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(From THE PACKER)

Drought Effect

(1:30)

University of California economists say the drought will NOT have a drastic effect on many fresh produce prices. They say dairy and meat product prices will rise dramatically, but only a few produce crops will make much impact on consumer food budgets.

Among these are lettuce, strawberries and potatoes. These predictions differ from assessments within the industry.

A spokesman for the Western Growers Association says there probably will not be a reduction in lettuce supplies this year. Most of the lettuce is grown in coastal areas or in the desert where the drought is having little affect.

Knowledgeable sources said strawberry supplies would not be hurt very much. Warm weather this winter has brought the strawberries on faster in southern California.

Although the California potato crop is expected to be down, prices may not be drastically affected depending on production in other parts of the country.

The drought will hurt melon and tomato production and many tree fruit crops probably also will be down in supplies.

The California navel orange crop at 27-million boxes is five percent lower than last year and harvest is about 50 percent completed.

Valencia prospects at 26-million boxes are about eight percent higher than last season.

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