

Prune Growers Urged to Leave Small Fruit Behind

YUBA CITY, CA July 14, 2009 – California prune growers face a difficult situation as harvest approaches. A glut of small prunes and poor economic conditions means that as much as 15% of this year's prune crop will not have enough value to cover the cost of dehydration. The largest California prune processor has announced that prunes smaller than 96 prunes per pound will not be paid for. Growers delivering such prunes will incur industry assessments, hauling and drying charges, but no payment. In order to adjust to market condition growers are strongly advised to leave small prunes in the field by slowing down and doing a good of harvest screening.

Growers can improve their returns by eliminating small fruit ahead of the dryer when the fruit is mechanically harvested. Doing so saves up to \$120 per acre by reducing drying costs and improving the value of the remaining fruit. "At harvest, growers should plan to use a bar chain with openings large enough so that what is know as 'D-screen' sized fruit will be left in the field," says Greg Thompson, General Manager of the Prune Bargaining Association. "That is usually about a 1 and 1/8" opening, but it depends on the fruit pressure—check with an advisor if unsure. Growers should be sure to keep the bars clean and run at a speed so that small fruit has a chance to fall through."

Besides the cost to growers, delivering small prunes this year will increase unsold inventory. "With a world-wide glut of small prunes this year and a severe economic downturn in most markets, it is of the utmost importance that growers work with their packer to eliminate small prunes before drying so the crop doesn't overburden drying, storage, and financial resources," says Thompson. "Eliminating these small prunes will reduce costs, save energy, and help keep our industry competitive in the world market—without that we won't survive."