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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Double the Yield, but Still a Disaster

YUBA CITY, CA, June 1, 2005 – Adverse weather conditions during bloom are blamed for another crop disaster for prune farmers. Recent crop survey results confirmed what most industry watchers have already concluded; a repeat of hot, dry, and windy conditions in March prevented adequate pollination during bloom, resulting in back to back crop disasters for prune farmers. The Prune Bargaining Association (PBA) recently conducted acreage and crop surveys to determine the extent of the damage.

Nearly 100 farmers responded to the PBA crop survey, representing 11,000 acres of prune trees. On average, they expect yields to double from last year. “The trouble is that yields were so low last year that even doubling production will not result in a normal crop,” explained Greg Thompson, General Manager of the Association. The projected average yield places state production back in the disaster category of 35% below average production of 2.2 dry tons per acre. This is hard news for an industry that is still reeling following last year’s near all time low production of only 47,828 tons statewide, or less than one-third of a normal crop.

Respondents also reported 1,543 acres damaged by hail (14% of the bearing acres reported), and that they would not pick 501 acres (4.5% of bearing acres reported) due to lack of crop. Expected dry size-count at harvest averaged 60 count per pound. Based on the results of this survey and its recently completed acreage survey, the PBA is forecasting a total prune crop of between 93,000 to 96,000 dry tons. “The world-wide supply of prunes will be another 30,000 or 40,000 lower than last year’s already tight supply,” said Thompson. “This is going to be hard on everyone involved.”

The Prune Bargaining Association was formed in 1968 as a grower-owned cooperative to improve the economy of the California prune industry, encourage the production of a quality product and provide a forum for growers to exchange ideas regarding the industry. The PBA establishes the industry’s raw product price for prunes.