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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Prune Crop Failure

YUBA CITY, CA, May 28, 2004 -- One of the healthiest and good-for-you fruits is expected to be in short supply this year. This spring, California's dried plum farmers experienced a devastating blow from adverse weather conditions. This is bad news for farmers who have lived through six years of a worldwide oversupply, low prices, and returns below the cost of production. In March, hot, dry, windy conditions during bloom caused a prune crop failure throughout the state. The widespread crop disaster is likely to result in the shortest crop on record.

Crop losses are reported in all of the growing areas and many growers will not harvest because of light or no-crop conditions. In the south Sacramento Valley it is estimated that as many as 60% of the farmers will not harvest because of the disaster.

A county-by-county analysis by the Prune Bargaining Association (PBA) based on a survey of growers, crop adjusters, and industry members puts the total crop at 63,500 tons, the shortest crop on record. "This crop failure is the final straw for some farmers," said Association manager, Greg Thompson. "Some are pushing out orchards or getting out of the business rather than risk another money losing year."

The PBA grower survey, which was conducted at the same time as the California Agricultural Statistics survey, shows that farmers expect to produce 45% of last year's 175,000 tons. This suggests that the state estimate will be in the range of 75,000 to 85,000 tons. Even so,

the PBA expects that actual delivered tonnage will be less than the state estimate since growers usually over-estimate light crops and many growers will opt to not pick at all.

In 1972, the official state estimate called for 95,000 tons, while the state actually produced the shortest crop on record—76,000 tons, or .88 tons per acre. A similar yield this year on the estimated 70,000 bearing acres in the state would result in a crop of only 62,000 tons. In addition, many farmers and industry members are worried that orchards are showing stress from adverse weather conditions and the heavy crop loads last year. Unusual disease and dieback symptoms are showing up even in orchards that have been well taken care of. There is concern that above-normal temperatures this summer could result in more crop loss.

On average, grower returns have fallen below cash cultural and overhead costs for the past six years due to worldwide over planting and production. While farmers in California have participated in programs to reduce acreage, farmers in France, Chile, and Argentina have expanded production and the world supply hit a near record of 391,000 metric tons in 2003. Consequently, the average returns for California farmers were nearly \$600 per acre below cash costs due to low prices and smaller sized fruit last year.

California produces 70% of the world's supply of dried plums, which have the highest anti-oxidant rating of any fruit or vegetable tested. Dried plums are high in fiber and potassium, are naturally sweet, and are an important part of a healthy diet for both children and adults.

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.