

# East County fire district to put its governing structure on November ballot

By [Rowena Coetseercoetsee@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:Rowena.Coetseercoetsee@bayareanewsgroup.com)

Posted: 07/12/2016 04:03:27 PM PDT | Updated: about 17 hours ago

BRENTWOOD -- The fire district serving far East Contra Costa County will be asking voters in November whether they want to retain an appointed board of nine at-large directors or choose the leadership themselves.

East Contra Costa Fire District's board decided to put the matter to its constituents in a 6-1 vote this week. Director Joe Young cast the dissenting vote; Directors Joel Bryant and Cheryl Morgan were absent.

Board members currently are appointed to four-year terms by the elected officials of the cities and unincorporated areas they represent: Brentwood and Oakley city councils choose four and three directors, respectively, and the county Board of Supervisors selects two.

The new resolution replaces one the board had adopted last month that asked the public if it wanted a fire district board with five members instead of nine.

The question of how many directors it takes to run a fire district -- whether it's nine, seven or the more typical five -- might come before voters next year instead.

The district's legal counsel suggested that it let residents decide either by holding a special election or using mail-in ballots.

The idea behind proposing changes to the structure of the board in stages is to make it easier for the public to digest, said Fire Chief Hugh Henderson.

Once that's been decided, the attorney recommended that the agency wait until the 2020 U.S. Census has been completed before asking voters whether they want to continue with at-large representation or have directors represent various geographic areas by drawing boundary lines to create those divisions.

Director Steve Smith says he strongly supports the idea of at-large representation because it makes it easier to find applicants for the fire board if all of them can come from any part of the district.

Running for office has its challenges, he said, so the larger the pool of prospective candidates the better, he said.

"There's an effort and a cost involved," Smith said, noting that candidates must collect signatures from registered voters to run as well as pay for signs, mailings and any statement they want to appear on the ballot.

What's more, he said it would be costly and impossible to draw the boundaries of wards in the outlying, less populated areas of the fire district in a way that would not create an inequity in voting power between residents there and those in more populous communities.

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**East Bay Times**

# Berkeley council criticizes hospital closure plans

By [Tom Lochner, tlochner@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:tlochner@bayareanewsgroup.com)

Posted: 07/13/2016 09:14:51 PM PDT | Updated: about 14 hours ago

BERKELEY -- The City Council on Tuesday registered its strong concern over plans to close Alta Bates hospital, calling upon owner Sutter Health to keep it running and possibly seismically retrofit it. A Berkeley institution since 1905, Alta Bates has the only remaining emergency room between Richmond and Oakland since Doctors Medical Center in San Pablo closed last year.

The vote followed a 6 p.m. rally in front of Old City Hall staged by the California Nurses Association to protest the planned closing, projected for sometime between 2018 and 2030.

Sutter Health intends to consolidate Alta Bates services at its Summit hospital in Oakland, one of three campuses that constitute Alta Bates Summit Medical Center, along with Herrick hospital in Berkeley.

Sutter CEO Chuck Prosper has said Alta Bates would shut down due in part to a 2030 state deadline requiring hospitals to be able to withstand a major earthquake.

But several speakers at Tuesday's rally said Sutter's plans to close are motivated not by seismic safety but profits, notwithstanding the corporation's nonprofit status.

Zenei Cortez, CNA co-president, noted that Sutter Health and Affiliates reported assets of more than \$14.3 billion as of December 2015, data reflected in a Sutter financial report provided by another CNA official.

Cortez dismissed the notion that urgent care could fill the gap if Alta Bates closes.

"Having a full-service hospital is critical," Cortez said.

"In order to have a safe and healthy community, we need a hospital here in Berkeley."

In San Pablo, LifeLong Medical Care opened an urgent care clinic the day before Doctors Medical Center closed in April 2015.

But LifeLong CEO Marty Lynch, in an interview that month, said, "We're not an ER; we can't offer emergency service. We'll be able to do a little bit more than a doctor's office, but by no means will it be like an emergency room."

Joining the rally were Berkeley Councilmen Kriss Worthington and Jesse Arreguin, former state Assemblyman Sandre Swanson, and aides to state Assemblyman Tony Thurmond and Berkeley Councilman Max Anderson.

Worthington read from a poem he wrote that ended with, "We must stop Sutter, Alta Bates will not shutter. Threatening closure is a Code Red, Tell Sutter to work with us instead."

Arreguin joined the nurses in contending the planned closure has nothing to do with seismic safety.

"It has to do with maximizing profits," said Arreguin, who chastised Sutter for deciding on its plan "unilaterally," without consulting Berkeley officials.

Prosper, in a letter sent Tuesday to the City Council, said the council resolution "contains numerous inaccuracies and draws conclusions about future health care delivery not supported by the facts.

"Sutter Health is committed to a strong medical presence in the City of Berkeley," Prosper said, adding, "Our target is to balance inpatient and outpatient services between Oakland and Berkeley with the goal of sustainability for Alta Bates Summit."

"Regardless of the seismic deadline, we must adapt to changes in health care if we are to remain viable in today's world," the letter continued.

"Operating two full-service hospitals (Alta Bates and Summit) less than three miles apart is inefficient and inhibits our ability to be most affordable to patients.

"In today's hypercompetitive environment, employers and consumers are choosing health services based on costs as much as quality. To excel we must be competitive and offer exceptional services."

Rebuilding on the current site is not feasible, Prosper added.

Several nurses spoke at the council meeting.

"Our community has already been devastated by the closure of Doctors Hospital," said Rochelle Pardue-Okimoto, a registered nurse in the Newborn Intensive Care unit at Alta Bates and an El Cerrito resident.

"The closure of Alta Bates will only put us in more danger."

Earlier, at the rally, Alta Bates emergency room nurse Bipin Walia said that "six-, eight- or 10-hour wait times will be the norm" at other area hospitals if Alta Bates closes, and warned of "bad patient outcomes, leading to patient deaths."

"You can't have a heart attack treated at an urgent care center," he added.

## East Bay Times

# Danville: Magee Ranch developer walks away

By Sam Richards , [srichards@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:srichards@bayareanewsgroup.com)

Posted: **07/13/2016** 11:26:24 AM PDT | Updated: about 18 hours ago

DANVILLE -- Four months after a judge ruled a new environmental impact report would be required for a controversial housing project off Diablo Road, its developer has pulled out and the landowning family has taken over.

What that means for the future of the proposed 69-house Magee Ranch housing development is unclear.

"It's too early to know," said Stuart Flashman, an attorney for Save Open Space, a Danville open space preservation group that sued over the project, citing among its concerns bicycle safety. "It certainly is an interesting development, that's for sure."

San Ramon-based SummerHill Homes had been the lead developer for the project, located near the main entrance to Mount Diablo State Park, since its inception in 2010.



Bicyclists travel on Diablo Road between Mt. Diablo Scenic Boulevard and Green Valley Road in Danville, Calif., on Wednesday, Feb. 4, 2015. A recent ruling by a Contra Costa County judge found that the Town of Danville acted improperly when it approved a proposal to build the 69-homes SummerHill housing development off of congested Diablo Road without first putting it to a town vote. (Doug Duran/Bay Area News Group)

But on Friday, town officials received a letter from property owner Magee Investments that said SummerHill is "no longer involved" with the project.

The project hit a major roadblock in March when Contra Costa County Superior Court Judge Barry Goode ruled the project's environmental impact report must be redone because the original one didn't sufficiently consider the safety of bicyclists along Diablo Road, an increasingly popular route for those making the climb up Mount Diablo.

Goode rejected SummerHill's assertion that a bicycle safety study could be added to the existing report, saying the issue was too important to simply add on to the existing report. The entire approval process, the judge said, would have to be redone.

It was after that admonition that SummerHill walked away from the project.

Representatives of SummerHill declined to comment Wednesday.

Jed Magee, president of Alamo-based Magee Investments, wouldn't comment on possible reasons for SummerHill's exit.

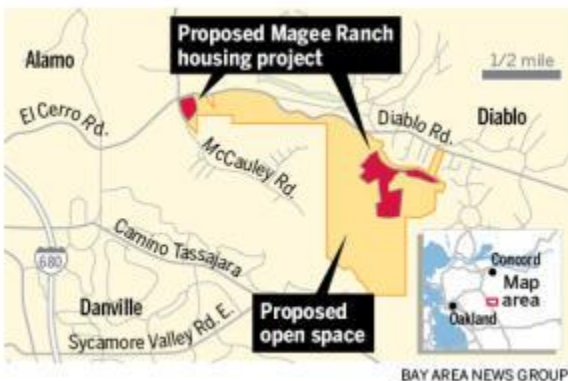
The project -- with its separate east and west components -- remains an active application with the town of Danville, said Dave Crompton, principal planner.

"We're waiting for (Jed Magee's) decision on moving forward," said Crompton, who expects the family will update the environmental impact report.

Magee said his family will take some time to decide what to do next, and that they put their company's name on the project to keep it alive while options are discussed. One decision yet to be made, he said, is whether another developer will be asked to lead the project.

"We're more ranchers than land developers," said Magee, whose family has operated that ranch since 1949. "It will take a little time for us to puzzle this out."

Save Open Space has been fighting the project since 2013, when it sued the Danville Town Council over environmental concerns. The group first sought to protect the picturesque historical farmland and later to make sure traffic created by the project would be addressed.



The Magee Ranch case has been of keen interest to bicyclist groups who hoped decisions like Goode's would help establish legal precedent for considering cyclists' safety in environmental studies for residential and commercial development.

"The March decision highlights the fact that when you raise the issue of bicycle safety, you can't just blow it off; it has to be taken seriously," Flashman said.

Maryann Cella, a member of the SOS group, said, "The group wants a solution that's fair to all concerned, including the landowners and to those that use Diablo Road" on four wheels or two.

"We're in a holding pattern here," she said. "We're hopeful that this is a positive sign, but it's too early to tell what this means."

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# Northern California Towns Are Running Out of Water

Paskenta is facing its third year in a row of water shortage because a creek, which is its sole source of water, is dropping. The town is one of more than a dozen in northern California facing water shortages.

WRITTEN BY  
Jane Braxton Little

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Jane Braxton Little is a freelance journalist based in California's northern Sierra Nevada who writes for Audubon, Discover, National Geographic and Scientific American.

**Groups Move to Oppose**



The drought has dropped water levels in Thomes Creek, the sole source of water for Paskenta, Calif., which may soon have to truck in water for residents again. U.S. Forest Service

**PASKENTA, POPULATION 112**, is an out-of-the-way place where rustic ranches grace grass-covered hills rolling west toward Mendocino Pass. Since the lumber mill closed in 1992, the Tehama County community 130 miles (210km) north of Sacramento has been settling into bucolic tranquility.

A water crisis has triggered a rude awakening.

Thomes Creek, the sole source of water for the Paskenta Community Services District, is dropping. A pump that taps the underflow from a pool in the creek is a mere 6ft (1.8m) below the current water level, said Janet Zornig, the district's manager.

"If it keeps up like this – and no rain in sight – we'll have to haul in water," she said.

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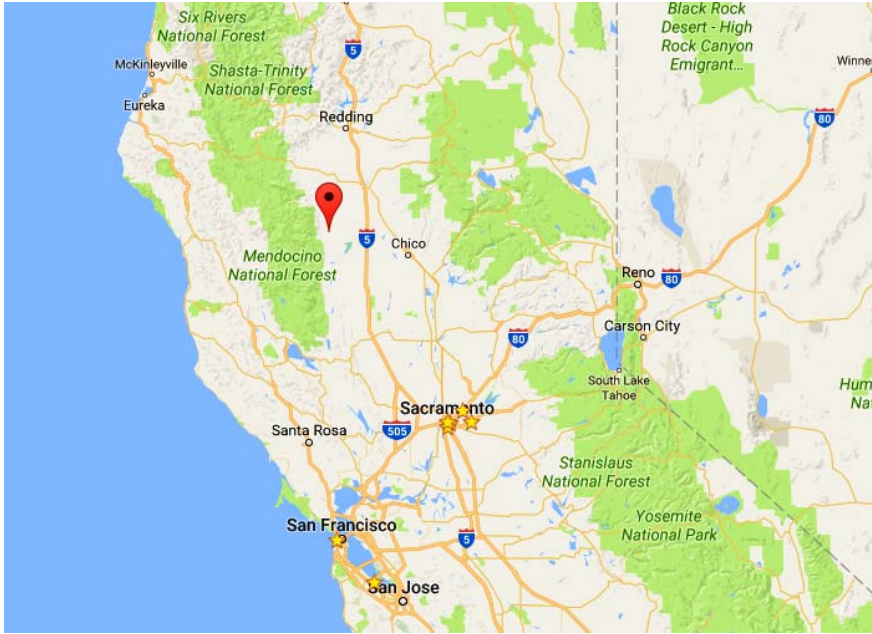
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While the crisis Paskenta is facing is the most critical, more than a dozen communities in northern California are grappling with diminishing water supplies. Most, like Paskenta, are located along the edges of the northern Sacramento Valley, where groundwater diminishes as the elevation rises. Most, like Paskenta, rely on streams that flow into the Sacramento River.

“All of the water systems located in that bathtub ring are struggling,” said Reese Crenshaw, a Redding-based district engineer with the state’s Division of Drinking Water, a part of the California Department of Public Health.

Four consecutive winters with little or no snowpack, followed by four dry summers, have upended water systems from Glenn and Colusa counties, on the west side of the Sacramento Valley, to Butte County on the eastern slope. The difficulties go beyond lower levels in the creeks and reservoirs they depend upon. Among them is a drought-caused requirement, issued by the state’s Division of Water Rights, that all systems on tributaries to the Sacramento River find alternative sources of water. These “drastic measures” are designed to protect fish and those who hold senior water rights, Crenshaw said.



Paskenta, Calif. is located 130 miles (210km) north of Sacramento. The town is one of about a dozen in northern California facing water shortages. (Google Maps)

Because it flows into the Sacramento River, Paskenta has been ordered to stop using Thomes Creek. It's a directive fraught with irony since the stream is already low enough to cause the current emergency.

Paskenta has been facing a water crisis for three consecutive years. In 2014, when Thomes Creek dropped to levels too low to pump, the community hauled water from Corning 20 miles (32km) to the east. The Corning City Council authorized 20,000 gallons (75,000 liters) of water per day for the Paskenta Community Services District. This approval was due to expire on June 30, 2015, but the council renewed it last year.

Last month Corning officials once again came to the rescue of their neighbors in Paskenta. Recognizing the dearth of water as a health and safety emergency, they

reauthorized the Paskenta district to collect and transport up to 20,000 gallons of water daily at the rate of \$5 per 1,000 gallons.

The trucking hasn't started yet but it appears imminent. Last year, when hauled water was the only source after August 26, the 250 people on the community water system were restricted to 100 gallons per household per day, Zornig said.

This year? "I can't tell you. Right now we're not out of water," she said.

Meanwhile, state officials are planning to drill a test well east of Paskenta to develop a secondary source as an alternative to Thomes Creek. Groundwater in that area is always scarce, said Crenshaw. If they don't hit a sufficient supply they will install a storage system with a capacity of 3 million gallons. The current storage tank holds around 200,000 gallons, enough for between five and eight days, he said.

The toll that drought has taken on northern California water systems is not limited to communities along the edges of the Sacramento Valley.

In 2014, Willits, in coastal Mendocino County, was down to a 100-day supply in the reservoirs that are the water source for its 4,850 residents. Since then the city has drilled a well as an emergency backup supply, paying most of the \$1 million costs out of reserve funds, said Willits mayor Bruce Burton.

This year the reservoirs are at 80 percent capacity.

Optimistic that “days of plenty” have returned, Burton dismissed any worries about diminishing water supplies caused by long-term climate changes.

“Talking about the weather is an ice-breaker for conversation. It’s another way to say hello,” he said.

Officials in nearby Brooktrails Township are not as sanguine. In 2014, when drought lowered the reservoirs that supply the community of 1,550, officials imposed mandatory rationing. The 110 gallons (415 liters) per day for a four-person household was barely over the state minimum of 27 gallons per day per person.

Today the Brooktrails reservoirs are full but the rationing continues, now raised to 250 gallons a day. And the community remains under a state-imposed moratorium on new connections until it provides an alternate drinking water source, said a spokesperson for general manager Denise Rose.

To ensure a stable supply of municipal water, the Division of Drinking Water required Brooktrails Township to request a tie-in to the city of Willits water supply. The community can’t afford the backup system costs, estimated at \$1 million just for the installation.

“It really needs to rain,” the Brooktrails spokesperson said.

Drought is creating a different set of problems for Del Oro Water Co. in Arbuckle, northwest of Sacramento. Overpumping caused the groundwater level to drop.

The subsidence that followed was severe enough to damage the district's well, said Crenshaw. In Elk Creek near Willows, lowering groundwater allowed manganese to enter the community system. Residents there drank bottled water until treatment brought the manganese to within acceptable standards, he said.

Crenshaw predicted that more communities will experience water supply problems as the drought continues. "Each community has its own set of issues and solutions to deal with," he said. "We can't move the towns. They are there."

For Paskenta, a third year of living with the strict rationing imposed by trucked-in water may be approaching. Zornig, the water district secretary, credited residents with rising to the challenge the shortages have created. "They have learned to cope. I'm proud of them," she said.

Meanwhile, she is hoping for rain: "It's a gamble every year but it has rained in the summer before."

**From:** Delta Protection Commission <nicole.bert@delta.ca.gov>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, August 17, 2016 1:28 PM  
**To:** Kate Sibley  
**Subject:** Agricultural Conservation Easement Funded near Discovery Bay



## Your Weekly Delta Event Update

### The Brentwood Agricultural Land Trust has received funding to protect farmland adjacent to Discovery Bay

The Strategic Growth Council announced funding for strategic agricultural conservation easement purchases throughout California on August 9th, including funds to the Brentwood Agricultural Land Trust for a 551 acre acquisition directly east of Discovery Bay.

The property was proposed to be developed with over 3,000 homes, but the purchase option lapsed when the developer failed to make a scheduled payment. The agricultural conservation easement will now halt any future expansion on the east side of Discovery Bay. See [here](#) for more information on the grant.

When completed toward the end of this year, this purchase will protect Swainson's hawk habitat, preserve vital groundwater recharging and protect the rural sunrise views of Discovery Bay residents. It also preserves a vital source of organic produce for nearby communities.

Congratulations to Kathryn Lyddan and the Brentwood Agricultural Land Trust for their successful effort!



## East Bay Times

# San Ramon: Over objections, old Dougherty Road to close

By [Sam Richards, srichards@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:srichards@bayareanewsgroup.com)

Posted: **08/19/2016** 12:10:57 PM PDT | Updated: a day ago



Traffic moves on the old Dougherty Road in San Ramon, Calif., on Wednesday, Aug. 17, 2016. The old road could be closed to traffic and made into a bike trail beginning next year. Residents of Gale Ranch community in San Ramon want to keep the road open. A new 1.5-mile stretch of Dougherty Road has been opened recently. (Ray Chavez/Bay Area News Group)

**SAN RAMON** -- The sign at the stoplight says "(Future) Dougherty Road," but for residents in the Gale Ranch area of Tassajara Valley, the future is now for the shiny new six-lane road, which opened a few weeks ago.

Time's running out, though, for the old two-lane Dougherty Road a few hundred yards to the east, as the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors voted Tuesday to stick with long-standing plans to close the road on Aug. 29.

Although supervisors agreed to monitor traffic congestion on surrounding roads, some residents are blasting the planned closure, saying it will create a traffic mess in the fast-growing residential area.

"In the mornings, traffic is backed up from here all the way to Bollinger, waiting to make a right turn onto the new road," said Viswanathan Ananthanarayanan, standing almost half a mile from the Bollinger Canyon Road stoplight. "They may have to make some adjustments ... their (traffic) studies were done long before all these people were here."

Ananthanarayanan and several other area residents told the supervisors on Tuesday that even with completion of the 1.5-mile stretch of Dougherty Road from Crow Canyon Road south to Bollinger Canyon Road near Alamo Creek, the old road should stay open for commuters dropping kids off at nearby schools, including Quail Run Elementary near the north end of Old Dougherty.

Having to reverse through the new Gale Ranch and Windemere neighborhoods back to Bollinger Canyon Road and then to the "New Dougherty" will create a traffic mess, said Nishant Asthana of San Ramon.

"This will increase my commute time by 35 or 40 minutes each morning," he said, adding that he and other residents wish they'd learned of the plans before seeing orange closure signs along the old road in June.

Asthana started an online Change.org petition, "Keep Old Dougherty Road open to reduce traffic congestion." It had gotten 893 signatures as of Thursday.

Supervisors said keeping the old road open would defy the Dougherty Valley Specific Plan, created in the mid-1990s, which calls for the new Dougherty Road and for closing the old one between Stoneleaf Road-Ivyleaf Springs Road and Bollinger Canyon Road. According to that plan, the old two-lane road will be converted into a recreational trail.

San Ramon officials, notably Mayor Bill Clarkson, have asserted there's an obligation to create that trail because Gale Ranch-area homebuyers were told it would be built.



Nishant Asthana, resident of Gale Ranch community in San Ramon, stands next to the old Dougherty Road in San Ramon, Calif., on Wednesday, Aug. 17, 2016. (Ray Chavez/Bay Area News Group)

After the county abandons the old roadway and the trail improvements are made as planned, the trail will be transferred to the city of San Ramon.

The city supports the closure plan, and Lisa Bobadilla, the city's transportation division manager, reiterated that point to the supervisors. The bike trail, she said, is also part of the city's general plan.

Bobadilla said San Ramon can live with monitoring the traffic for a few months. "We don't anticipate any significant traffic congestion," she said.

Still, the supervisors chose to move ahead with caution, lest they "abandon a road, greenscape it and then decide, 'Oh, wait a minute, maybe the (traffic) concerns were real,'" Supervisor Mary Piepho said.

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Published August 24th, 2016

## Fire Season is Flaming to Full Strength

*By Nick Marnell*

Contra Costa County Fire Protection District Chief Jeff Carman made a whirlwind tour of his district in early August, delivering a somber message to residents and officials about the dangers of the wildfire season. From his commissioners meeting to his board of directors meeting to his speech at the Lafayette Rotary Club, the chief's message was on point: now is not the time to let down your guard.

"The longer we go without consistent precipitation, the drier the fuels get, which is why many of the most devastating fires are seen in the late summer and fall," the chief said.

"People think it's cooler, the fog is starting to come in, it's time to keep the windows open at night because fire season is coming to a close. I urge our residents not to be fooled into thinking fire danger is waning because the opposite is actually occurring," Carman said. "The fuels we see in Lafayette, Walnut Creek, Moraga and Orinda are heavier, and have been drying out all summer."

The chief said he is always concerned about major devastation in Lafayette because the Lafayette area is most prone to those heavy fuel fires, and because of the amount of wildland area so close to the expensive homes.

"It takes longer to start those fires, but also longer to put them out," Carman said.

Carman said that the district is better prepared to handle wildfires this year because of two components added to district operations. ConFire uses the sheriff's department helicopter to dump water on wildfires in areas difficult to access with ground crews. Plus, the district staffs a bulldozer during the peak activity period, rather than calling in an operator to run the bulldozer when needed.

"It cuts the line very quickly," the chief said. "It does what a team of firefighters can do cheaper and more quickly, so we can put the firefighters back into service."

This year's early fire season has been responsible for the destruction of several homes in the district, Carman said. He asks for the public's vigilance, because his crews have told him that they have seen more property loss this year than they can ever remember.

Surely that is a record the chief does not want to set in 2016.

Reach the reporter at: [nick@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:nick@lamorindaweekly.com)

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## The Sacramento Bee

# California farm revenue plunges in 2015

By Dale Kasler

August 30, 2016

[dkasler@sacbee.com](mailto:dkasler@sacbee.com)

Farm revenue in California dropped by more than \$9 billion last year as the drought forced farmers to scramble for water and crucial commodities declined in price, according to data released by the state and federal governments Tuesday.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's economic research service said farm income totaled \$47.07 billion last year in California. That compared with a record \$56.61 billion in 2014.

All through the drought, which has cut off deliveries of surface water supplies to large swaths of the Central Valley, farmers have been able to [increase revenue](#) by pumping more groundwater and switching to high-dollar crops such as almonds. Those strategies have brought criticisms from environmentalists and others about agriculture's water use, particularly the depletion of aquifers in the San Joaquin Valley.

The figures from 2015 show the era of rising revenue has ended, at least for the time being.

"These numbers certainly reflect drought impacts in 2015, which led to the fallowing of 540,000 acres," said the California Department of Food and Agriculture in a statement on the USDA numbers.

However, the state also noted that prices fell for such key commodities as milk and tree nuts, which represent two of the most important commodities produced in California. The state's dairy business alone dropped by more than \$3 billion last year. [Almond sales](#) went from \$7.4 billion to \$5.3 billion. Both declines were the result of price drops after several boom years.

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