

# Growers total losses; produce prices climb

By KATHY KREIGER  
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Farmers, gardeners and produce dealers are still adding up their losses from the record-breaking cold spell, but one thing's for sure: you'll be noticing its effects at the grocery store.

Chas Sneyers, organic produce wholesaler from Watsonville Coast, said the price of leaf lettuce has jumped almost 100 percent from \$10 a case to \$20. Organic romaine lettuce, he said, has gone from \$18 to \$22 a box.

"No one wants to quote on citrus yet," he said. "All the northern California stuff is gone. Even stuff in storage sheds was damaged. The price of organic juice oranges is now \$20 for a 40-pound box. As of today, it's probably going up 30 to 40 percent."

"It's early to say exactly who

lost what. By the end of this week we'll have a better picture."

Scott Wolfram, produce manager of New Leaf Community Market was not caught unprepared by the cold spell.

"I heard the weather report and loaded up on Friday on everything green, plus broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower and fennel. I loaded up on citrus, too," said Wolfram.

He said he'll maintain current prices until stocks are exhausted, probably sometime this weekend. He raised the price of romaine lettuce from 89 cents a head to \$1.09 Monday, and "it will go up higher." Wolfram said he'll have to replace some organic produce with commercially-grown.

Joe Curry of Molino Creek Farms said the North Coast organic farm lost approximately

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\$3,000 worth of crops, despite temperatures that "only" dropped to 23.

"We lost a bunch of lettuce, and probably some broccoli and cabbage," said Curry. "Broccoli and cabbage have never been a problem for us before."

Nurseries, too, were hard-hit by the cold.

"This season's got me scared," said Dave Cavanaugh of Watsonville's Cavanaugh Color, which specializes in potted color plants. "We're in danger till April. There's no reason we couldn't have another 20-degree snap."

Cavanaugh said he's lost half his outside inventory and estimated his losses at \$150,000 to \$175,000. By contrast, damage from last year's earthquake was \$50,000, he said.

Cavanaugh said he'll be laying off two-thirds of his 17 workers.

Plants at the UC Santa Cruz Arboretum will probably pull through, but their flowers are severely damaged, according to director Ray Collette.

"It's a terribly serious freeze," said Collette, "but one we're unlikely to see again in our lifetime."

Arboretum staff will use the cold spell as a chance to better assess hardiness levels for their collection of plants from all corners of the globe, Collette said.

He did not expect to lose the arboretum's collection of eucalyptus despite temperatures that dipped lower than the 1972 cold spell which killed back many eucalyptus to the ground, causing a major fire hazard in the Berkeley Hills.

Collette said many plants may suffer later in the year, as fungus and other plant pathogens opportunistically attack the weakened plants. He cautioned gardeners to

# Cold tough on birds, too

By KATHY KREIGER  
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SANTA CRUZ — The freeze of the century has broken pipes, destroyed millions of dollars worth of crops, and ruined a lot of people's Christmases this year.

It's also been hard on the county's birds.

"Hummingbirds are pouring in from the surrounding neighborhoods," said Ray Collette, director of the UC Santa Cruz Arboretum. Collette said the freeze has destroyed flowers, which provide the tiny nectar-sippers' main food source.

A dead yellow-and-white songbird was spotted hanging upside down, apparently frozen, on a bush in the UC Santa Cruz Garden Sunday.

Garden manager Orin Martin

said he'd also seen a couple of birds die the previous day, and others were slowed enough that they could almost be caught.

Sandpipers were seen inland on the west side of Santa Cruz and in Live Oak Monday morning, staggering around looking dazed.

Other shorebirds were spotted Monday morning walking on the frozen surface of Corcoran Lagoon.

"Most birds fly around till they find something to eat," said David Suddjian of the Santa Cruz Bird Club.

Suddjian said that residents who have been feeding birds should be sure to continue to put out food through the winter, since birds that might have flown away are now dependent on the food sources.

postpone any pruning back of frost-damaged foliage till later in the spring, saying that the dead foliage will insulate the plants now.

Chris Totten of the San Lorenzo Lumber Garden Center on River Street said they lost between \$4,000 and \$5,000 worth of plant materials, mostly brightly-colored plants like cyclamen, azaleas and Christmas cactus.

He said the nursery has done "brisk sales on frost blankets and anti-transpirants, which is mostly too little too late."

Some plants will benefit from the cold, said Totten. "Fruit trees will get a good chill and roses can go into a full dormancy. Delphiniums,

lilacs, anything that wants a winter rest will probably benefit. As a gardener I take it in stride. We're dealing with living creatures."

County growers were gloomy about the chance of recouping their losses.

County Farm Bureau president Jeff Brothers said "With any luck we'll see the state and/or federal declare it a disaster area. That will help move the machine in that direction. It's not the most encouraging situation."

"It sure is sad," said Brothers. "There's nothing quite like walking around your fields and seeing them so beat up by Mother Nature."