

# January's been the driest ever

## Rainfall 6.7 percent of normal

By NANCY SCHACHTER

This has been the driest January since rainfall records have been kept in Watsonville. The records go back to 1879.

This month's 0.30 inches of rainfall in the city is a mere 6.7 percent of the average January rainfall of 4.51 inches. It is also two-hundredths of an inch less rain than fell in January 1976, the first year of California's most recent drought.

The dry, sunny weather has been a boon to tourists, farmers, fishermen and construction workers, all of whom are often idled on rainy winter days.

The clear weather has enabled area fishermen to fish for rock cod in the ocean or travel to the San Francisco Bay to fish for herring. For some fishermen the extra month of fishing has been a big help, and a needed one, since they did so poorly during salmon season last year.

The dry month has also given farmers and ranchers a chance to get in to their fields and do more preparation for the coming growing season, according to Rick Bergman, deputy Santa Cruz County agricultural commissioner. Vegetable growers are finding it easier to get in to their fields to do discing or plant their crops, and apple growers are also enjoying the easier access to their crops.

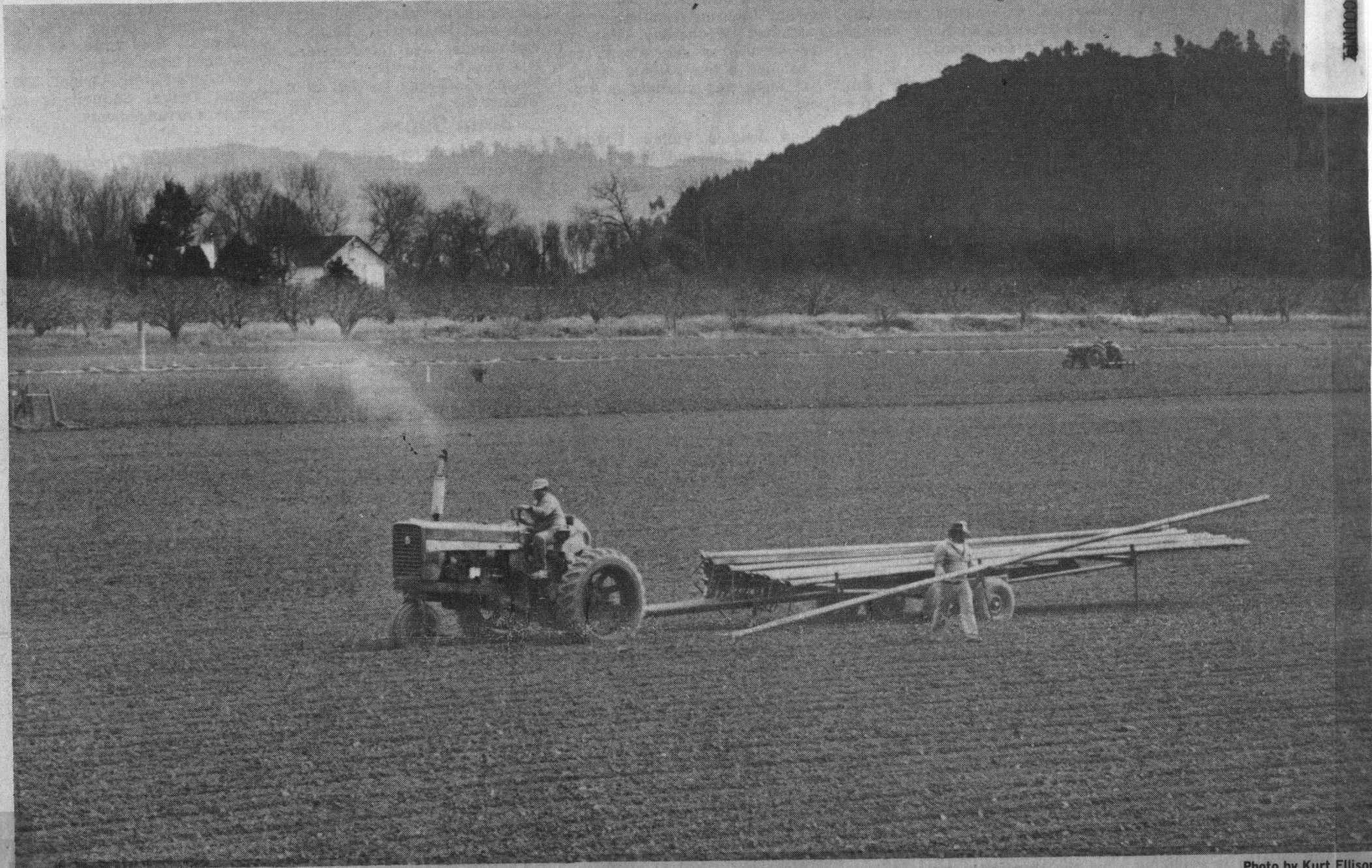


Photo by Kurt Ellison

The nice weather means fields, like this one on Riverside Road, are dry and easy to work on.

REFERENCE

7075

WATSONVILLE  
REGISTER-PALMARIAN  
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Bresnahan said. "We'd try to get in with a four-wheel drive and the truck would sink up to its axle." But, he said, with the clear weather the crew was finally able to get in to the construction site.

Bresnahan said the weather has saved a lot of money on construction projects.

"When you can't work, the clock is ticking. The interest accrues and it could cost somebody hundreds of dollars," he said.

Campgrounds, beaches and hotels in Santa Cruz County have also been busier than usual this month. State campgrounds have been filling up during the weekends, according to Larry Cermak, chief ranger of the Pajaro Coast division of the state Parks Department.

"This past weekend I went down to Seacliff myself at 6 p.m. and had a hard time finding a parking place anywhere near the pier," Cermak said.

Beaches and the two main roads leading into Santa Cruz from the San Francisco Bay

Area were also packed this past weekend, according to Joe Flood of the Santa Cruz County Convention and Visitor's Bureau.

"What's really helping us is that the (San Francisco) TV stations are doing our weather, and Santa Cruz is the highest," Flood said. Until recently the television stations regularly reported the weather in Monterey because there's a weather station there, but did not include Santa Cruz-area weather in their reports. To remedy that, the Convention and Visitor's Bureau made arrangements with the TV stations to supply daily Santa Cruz weather reports, Flood said.

Flood said a lot of people must have seen those reports and heard that the temperature was in the 70s in Santa Cruz, because they came in numbers over on the weekend.

"There are a certain amount of apple growers that have wanted to do more spraying compared to last year when they couldn't get into their orchards at all," Bergman said.

What the long-term effect of the dry month will be on local agriculture remains to be seen, Bergman said, but weather during the spring months is the most critical for the crops.

The same sunny, dry days that allow farmers to get in to their fields give construction crews the opportunity to work, as against the forced layoffs of rainy days. Jim Bresnahan, vice president of Da Pont Construction, said a lot of work has been done this month on the three projects he has in progress, including some residential units at Clifford Avenue and Main Street.

"We were having a heck of a time. The rains came and we couldn't build our streets,"