

# Late-year freeze hits hard at county farmers

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The Pajaro Valley's agriculture community started off 1990 still reeling from the impacts of the October 1989 earthquake and ended it by picking up crop remnants left over from the coldest winter spell in memory.

Before they could really get down to business, however, growers in the state were hit with a regulation requiring that they report all pesticides and chemicals used on crops.

It wasn't an easy task, staff of the agricultural commissioner office, charged with accepting the monthly reports, soon learned.

For many farmers it may have appeared the paperwork demands would never end because some were still wrapped up in earthquake-assistance red tape.

While the local industry reported losses of \$13 million in structures, products and equipment associated with the quake, gross production revenue for the valley reached \$345 million at the end of that year. For this year, Santa Cruz County Deputy Agricultural Commissioner Rick Bergman anticipates the outcome will remain constant.

"I don't have reason to believe it will be much different from the previous year," he said.

The freeze that devastated farmers of outdoor products earlier this month will probably take its toll on 1991 receipts, Bergman said.

Possible exceptions might be cut flowers and artichokes, the No. 13 crop in Monterey County, which

## Year in review

lost an entire month's harvest during the week the mercury plummeted. The absence of chokes in produce bins will probably be noticed nationwide because Castroville supplies 70 percent of the artichokes grown in California, which grows most of the chokes in the United States.

The thistle claimed its share of the spotlight on several occasions this past year. On the heels of a frost-bitten choke that flooded the market last spring, an organically grown artichoke was unveiled. In conjunction with a technical consultant, Castroville-based Sea Mist Farms launched the 94-acre experimental venture it may expand later.

Apples are another commodity having less than a banner year. While the summer harvest wasn't considered great by area growers, it was expected to top 1989's dismal sales total of \$9.3 million, a \$5 million drop from 1988.

And just when observers started to believe Monterey County's most lucrative commodity, iceberg lettuce, couldn't get any bigger — it got smaller. Size-wise that is. Scientists at the Salinas office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture developed a tennis ball-sized lettuce head, available in red or the traditional green.

The Santa Cruz County farming community honored 82-year-old George Cowles as its Farmer of the Year.