

Unseasonal rains give growers second hit

By LARAMIE TREVINO

STAFF WRITER

The strawberry community, still picking up after last week's unwellcome rain that slowed down production, probably suffered additional setbacks from Sunday night's half-inch downpour, industry leaders say.

"There's no way to estimate for total losses until the end of the season," said Clint Miller, a grower with Driscoll Strawberry As-

sociates.

But his yield and payroll figures speak volumes about his company's current plight.

On May 24, his crews picked 15,000 crates, an amount in keeping for this high-volume period in the April to November strawberry season. Then it rained, and crew efforts went to stripping plants of ruined fruit and "trying to pick" the remaining berries for the fresh and less-lucrative processing mar-

kets.

But the result was loss of a "tremendous amount" of crop as reflected in the harvesting figures from May 25 through Saturday when a total of 3,600 crates were picked.

"My payroll is off 50 percent," Miller said.

Ed Kelly, of the Kelly-Thompson ranch, said Sunday 350 pickers there threw away 70,000 trays of rain-spoiled berries, and he ex-

pected to lose as many again this week from the weekend rains.

Most strawberry pickers in the Pajaro Valley, where the crop is a \$130 million-plus commodity, are paid an hourly and piece rate.

A supervisor at Carriage House, a Watsonville-based processor, this morning said "quite a bit" of fruit was received at the plant last week, while shipments were coming in today at a "steady" pace.

See BERRY / back of section ▶

✓ CF Weather

BERRY RP 6/1/93
p. 12

▶ From Page 1

Teresa Thorne, a spokeswoman for the California Strawberry Advisory Board, conceded that while Sunday's rain "wasn't good," she didn't expect "substantial" widespread damage to result from it.

"They're still recovering and catching up from the half-inch that fell last week," she said.

Breezy conditions help to dry off the plants and keep fungus diseases from taking over, Thorne said. Warm, humid weather, however, can prove detrimental, Miller said.

Thorne, unwilling to discuss monetary loss estimates, said production figures for the week ending Saturday were not scheduled to be released by the state's Department of Agriculture until this afternoon.

That data will show figures significantly off from the last report for the week ending May 22, the conclusion of peak week when 4 million crates were picked statewide.

"There's going to be a natural tapering off," Thorne said.