



ERIC PAUL ZAMORA / THE FRESNO BEE

Frank Lourenco uses a chain saw to cut almond trees struck down by wind over the weekend on his father's land northwest of Madera on Tuesday.

Storms bring down almond trees

Winds toppled thousands in some Madera County orchards.

By Dennis Pollock / The Fresno Bee

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Thousands of almond trees were uprooted by winds that swept through soggy Madera County orchards in recent days.

Jose Queros of Modesto said he may have lost close to 1,000 trees at his Madera County orchard.

Queros, 43, who works as a herdsman at a Modesto dairy, said he bought the 52-acre orchard in Madera County last March as a retirement investment.

Queros was one of a handful of growers who reported orchard losses in Madera County. A ranch manager, who was not identified, reported losing nearly 2,000 trees on 1,300 acres, said Jay Seslowe, assistant agricultural commissioner for Madera County.

The manager said that in a normal winter season it's not uncommon to lose 1% of an orchard's trees, particularly for mature orchards, when winds follow heavy rain. This year, he said, losses have been between 2% and 2.5%, and the downed trees are at least 15 years old.

Seslowe said central San Joaquin Valley commissioners will meet today to consider whether reports of damage warrant a formal survey of growers.

Queros said nearly half the trees in his orchard were blown over Sunday. He first learned of the loss from a caretaker on the property near Avenue 17 and Road 18 about 6:30 p.m. Sunday. He said he first saw the toppled trees Monday.

The trees were between 20 and 25 years old.

Queros has not decided whether he will replant.

Almond trees start bearing nuts in the third year after planting and are bearing fully by the seventh year, said Mark Freeman, a University of California Cooperative Extension farm adviser.

Freeman said production diminishes significantly for trees that are 20 to 25 years old.

Around the Valley, officials with county agricultural departments reported no other significant crop losses from the rain and wind that coursed through the region in recent days.

A chance of rain is forecast for this morning, Friday and Saturday.
The reporter can be reached at dpollock@fresnobee.com or (559) 441-6364.

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