



The Terra Nova Trading 2026 California Almond Crop Estimate

Starting, as usual, with last year's efforts at estimating the 2025 California almond crop, we were comfortable with our "bold" estimate of 2.8B lb at a time when the most vocal commentators in our industry were utterly convinced the crop "would never make 2.5B lb". The latest position report points to an eventual 2025 crop of about 2.7B lb, only 100M lb short of our estimate. Given the large multiplier of bearing acreage in California and the fact that 2025 had the lowest kernel weight turnouts (kernel yield compared to total field weight) in the last 10 years, the 100M lb gap is well within reasonable estimating range, and the estimate held up against considerable industry skepticism.

Turning to our estimate for the 2026 crop year, we realized there was more at stake than ever before. In December 2025, the Almond Board of California decided to eliminate the Objective Measurement Report from the 2026 calendar. This meant we were more determined than ever to provide an honest and meaningful estimate for the whole almond industry to use to make marketing decisions for the upcoming season. No pressure?!

Before the 2025 calendar year was even over, we had a Tule fog event that many people from the valley said they hadn't seen since the 1980s. The Central Valley was blanketed with fog that didn't clear for over a month. With the trees healthy, and another "below average" crop last year, many people hoped this dormancy weather was the start of conditions the trees needed to finally carry a good crop in 2026.

Despite some wide variations depending on location, 2026 almond bloom overall started a little earlier than normal, with sunny and warm conditions for the opening days of the earliest-blooming varieties. The warm weather helped bloom progress quickly, with some growers talking of a flash bloom, just as conditions took a definite turn for the worse. Many parts of the state experienced very cold and rainy weather right around peak Nonpareil bloom. We had a couple of mornings hit close to or at freezing temperatures, and we even saw snow in the North. Conditions improved at the end of February to catch the very end of Nonpareil bloom and all the latest-blooming varieties like Butte/Padre.

Post-bloom weather, considered to be just as important for crop development, was favorable under warm and sunny skies during the first half of March, and many growers were optimistic of an improved crop for 2026. The second half of March brought record-breaking heat in all almond-growing regions of

California and caused lots of questions to be raised by growers at the time about whether this heat might have a detrimental effect on the almond crop. Many growers scrambled to ensure sufficient water and (increasingly expensive) fertilizers and nutrients were being supplied to the orchards and developing almond crops. Some unusual weather events have continued in April with heavy rains and localized hail being reported in certain areas of the central growing region. As our trip started only a day after one of the more "popular" hail events due to pictures being shared globally, we did not see any notable damage caused by hail. While hail is an extremely localized event and is not a statewide issue for the crop, it always starts the emotional roller coaster.

After growers' initial optimism about the potential 2026 almond crop, especially from the vocal part of Fresno/Madera, this optimism subsided as the weeks progressed. We went through many emotional events in such a short time period (healthy-looking trees and great bud development pre-bloom, followed by the topsy-turvy weather during bloom, war in the Middle East, dramatic increases in fertilizer prices, the hottest March on record, etc.), and many growers' early consensus fell around "a similar crop to last year's 2.7B lb." Comments included a "poor and spotty" Nonpareil crop, better-looking Monterey and Independence crops, and some wide variations in expected yields depending on location, with Northern growers the most pessimistic about their crop prospects. We believe most have fallen around this 2.7 number due to the uncertainty of all the above-mentioned events, and "about the same" seems as good a guess as any. Buyers' opinions around the world seem to lean toward better crop prospects of around 2.80 to 2.85B lb due to trees being rested after a poor to average crop in 2025, along with favorable growing conditions last summer prompting less stress in almond orchards for 2026. As mentioned above, we also heard very optimistic views from Fresno/Madera around early March giving buyers hope of a return towards "big crops".

By now the estimate methodology is familiar for regular readers of our crop report. Covering almost 1,600 miles over a full 7-day period, we visited 558 sample orchards in all almond-growing counties with three separate readings in each orchard. This format helps to give an overall impression of California's almond crop as well as providing sufficient readings in each county to accurately represent California's entire almond orchard population. Before describing our observations this year, it is worth reminding readers of this report that differences can exist between estimating an entire crop in April and the final crop receipts that are harvested 5 to 6 months later. Several variables remain in front of this crop. Growers' ongoing decisions on cultural practices this year are being shaped by much higher fertilizer and other input costs because of the war in the Middle East, which will affect what gets put on the trees over the rest of the season. Climatic conditions from now to harvest, including any further heat events or water shortages, will have a direct effect on kernel fill and final sizing. And conditions at harvest itself always have a part to play in the final almond crop California produces each season. The Sisyphean task seems to have a heavier boulder up a larger hill every year due to the ever-increasing variables.

One of the benefits of releasing this crop report a little later this year is that we had the opportunity to see Land IQ's Initial Acreage Estimate for 2026, which shows a reduction of at least 15,000 total bearing acres. Our own acreage multiplier removes stressed and abandoned orchards as our visual inspection of these orchards around the state tells us that it is very unlikely they will be harvested.

Based on our own observations, we also believe that orchard removals and re-plants are starting to increase in many areas other than the southern San Joaquin Valley as almond pricing remains at more attractive levels than a few years ago. Based on these observations, our own bearing acreage multiplier that we will be using for this 2026 crop estimate will be 1,340,000 bearing acres. New bearing acreage of about 35,000 planted in 2023, combined with approximately 55,000 acres being removed, gives us a reduction of 20,000 from our own bearing acreage number used last year. It is interesting to note that removals are again heavily concentrated in the southern counties of Kern, Fresno and Madera due to poor water availability, along with Merced and Stanislaus counties which have the highest proportion of older trees. Even more noteworthy is that these counties have traditionally been California's highest-yielding counties in the past.

Our general observations for the 2026 California Almond crop are as follows:

- We saw many orchards this year that appeared quite "leafy" with below average to average crops. When we saw the occasional excellent crop that did not have this same look, it was a good reminder that orchards supporting a lot of nuts do not tend to produce very green and leafy trees.
- Younger orchards, unless they were a self-pollinating variety like Independence or Shasta, were not carrying anything close to their maximum potential in most growing areas this year.
- Other than the Northern counties of Solano, Yolo and Colusa, which looked similar to last year, much of the North looked poor to very poor, especially Glenn, Tehama and Butte counties. Whilst it is easy to dismiss the North because it is a small growing region, we constantly remind ourselves that if all the North was treated as a single county, it has been the second largest producing "county" in the state after Fresno for the last 3 years. Overall, we expect the North to be down considerably.
- Central growing counties were a little inconsistent except for Independence orchards. San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Merced had decent crops, and we thought the Ripon area (again) and the eastern foothills orchards east of Modesto/Oakdale looked good. While we believe this area looked good, we expect the central growing region to be similar to, or slightly down from, last year, especially after San Joaquin Co. had its best crop on record in 2025.
- Madera County showed definite improvement over last year, while Westside Fresno County orchards looked a little better than last year. The Kerman area and eastern Fresno are a mixed bag, with alternate bearing being the deciding factor in this year's crop. Given how poor Fresno and Madera were last year, we expect both counties to show improved crops this year.
- The far Southern counties of Kings, Kern and Tulare had many inconsistent and very spotty crops other than Independence and self-fertile variety orchards. Areas with better access to water seemed to look a little better, but orchards outside of irrigation districts or in poor irrigation districts are starting to show the effects of SGMA's water regulations.

When looking at the main varieties planted in California, our general observations excluding regional variations are as follows:

Nonpareil. In 2026, we expect a similar Nonpareil crop, which will be aided by what we expect to be larger kernels for this year. Overall, it looked quite spotty in many areas of the state as it did last year.

Monterey. Last year's crop turned out to be slightly disappointing for this variety and was probably made worse by poor kernel turnouts at hulling and shelling. While we do see an improvement, we still do not see the bumper crops that the Monterey variety can sometimes produce. Nut drop was quite pronounced in this variety while we were on our crop tour, indicating that the crop is probably quite good and the tree cannot support all the nuts. We expect a slightly bigger Monterey crop than last year.

Independence. Last year was a much better year for this variety, and total receipts improved by almost 20%. With the poorer bloom weather for other traditional pollinating varieties, this year Independence has another decent crop, but we expect yield per acre to be down slightly. Independence acreage is still increasing at a fast pace without signs of any slowdown, due to lower costs for bees, single harvest, and what appears to be a good "hedge" against poor bloom weather as was the case this year. As the multiplier increases, even with a slightly lower yield per acre, we expect to see a record Independence crop this year, if only just.

Carmel. This variety will continue its slow decline into obscurity with almost zero new plantings. We expect a smaller Carmel crop this year marked by poor nut set and a high amount of crazy top and older orchard removals.

Fritz. Another good to excellent crop for this steady-producing variety with decent nut counts in most orchards. However, with the larger kernel sizing but older orchards being removed, overall crop receipts should be similar to, or slightly lower than, last year.

Aldrich. After a stellar performance last year, Aldrich has a poor crop this year and much lower nut counts. Kernel sizing should be larger for this variety, so we expect a much smaller Aldrich crop but with larger kernel sizes.

Butte/Padre. Last year's improvement in yields for these two varieties gave us a slightly better Butte/Padre crop in 2025. This year, Butte/Padres were the only "standouts" over and over again and even wowed us in certain spots. With limited new plantings and further older orchard removals, even with such a good crop on the trees, the multiplier will give us a slightly smaller Butte/Padre crop this year.

Wood Colony, Winters and Price. All of these varieties look to be decidedly average this year, especially Wood Colony. Combined, these varieties only make up approximately 5% of the total crop and so cannot make any meaningful difference to overall crop receipts, but we expect to see less production from these pollinators in 2026.

For those that just want to get to the point, all of the above lands us at our estimated average yield for this year's 2026 almond crop at 1,985 lb per acre.

Crop Year	Yield Per Acre (lb)
2016	2,210
2017	2,200
2018	2,090
2019	2,170
2020	2,490
2021	2,220
2022	1,900
2023	1,780
2024	1,960
2025	1,930
10-Year Average	2,095
5-Year Average	1,960

When you consider that we are estimating the 2026 crop to be the fifth year in a row where statewide almond production will be less than 2,000 lb per acre, questions need to be asked, and assumptions need to be re-evaluated, about what California is capable of producing in the next 5 years. Regular readers will recognize this is a question we first raised in our 2019 report, and one we have been circling back to each year since. As we were driving, we started asking ourselves: why have we seen this (dramatic) reduction in yields since our record crop in 2020? A few general hypotheses we have come to are as follows:

- Reduced fertilizer and other inputs during the 2021 to 2024 period have resulted in a possible permanent reduction in yields for these orchards. Even today, some growers are still not putting on the recommended amount of inputs due to a sharp increase in prices that will continue throughout this season.
- Orchards in Kern and Fresno counties, especially the highly productive Western Fresno orchards, are being "replaced" by acreage in less productive areas in the Central and Northern growing areas. Over the longer term, this will continue to lower the average statewide almond production per acre. The shifting geography of new plantings is one of the more concrete pieces of evidence we have seen that this trend is structural rather than cyclical. The chart below compares new plantings from 2016 to 2020 (the wave that drove the record 2020 crop) to those that became bearing in the last two years (planted in 2022 and 2023):

Region	2016 to 2020	2022 to 2023
	acres planted / share of total	acres planted / share of total
North	114k / 20%	23k / 26%
Central	164k / 30%	37k / 41%
South	279k / 50%	29k / 33%
TOTAL	557k / 100%	89k / 100%

The South's share of new plantings has dropped from 50% to 33% in just one cycle, with the Central and North picking up the difference. Per-acre average yields in the new plantings should be expected to underperform the highly productive orchards being removed from Western Fresno and Kern, which structurally lowers the statewide yield ceiling for years to come.

- SGMA water regulations have been accelerating the removal of orchards in areas that relied heavily on pumping groundwater, and these are our higher-producing orchards. These orchards are not being replaced with replanted almonds, but with either limited permanent plantings of pistachios, temporary plantings of row crops, or even solar panels that pay rent and do not use any water. This trend will likely continue until SGMA's restricted groundwater pumping requirements have been met.
- Reduced production from "non-bearing" orchards as non-bearing acreage has reduced dramatically in the last 5 years.

As many stakeholders, both in California and around the world, were hoping for much improved California production, this estimate will leave a lot of people wanting. However, we are starting to think that all of those in our industry (and even those adjacent) should start to adjust towards this "new normal". Whilst another bumper crop cannot be ruled out in the future if the stars align, and Mother Nature has shown in many instances she is able to do some amazing things with almonds in this state, it does seem increasingly unlikely, perhaps impossible, that we will be able to produce 2,200 lb per acre on an average basis like we used to only a decade ago.

We would like to thank those people who regularly contribute their time helping us put together our crop estimate, which is our honest and genuine effort to provide something meaningful for the almond industry as a whole. We would also like to thank our readers for making the effort to read all of this report and not just focus on the number. As always, we believe the value of this report is in the detailed observations and the dialogue it can create in an industry that will no longer enjoy the objective crop estimate in July as a "backstop." While we believe the removal of the objective estimate is a long-term negative for the industry, we hope our estimate can give the needed information to make up for the absence of such an important data point. And if you disagree with our observations, our money-back guarantee continues!

We also welcome any comments, suggestions or limited criticism of any of the above contents.

With kind regards, TERRA NOVA TRADING