

2020 Walnut Freeze: Reporting the Damage

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2020 brought yet another major autumn freeze. There were also sudden autumn freeze events in November of 2018 and 2019, however, observations in the northern Sacramento Valley indicate that the autumn 2020 freeze damage was more extensive than damage from either of the previous two years. Conversely, farm advisors as well as agricultural commissioners in central and southern Sacramento Valley counties received fewer freeze calls in the spring of 2021, than they had in spring 2019.

Our best guess for explaining the walnut freeze damage observed in 2021 are freeze events on the mornings of November 10th and 12th 2020. Temperatures had previously been unusually warm in the first two weeks of November with highs around 80 degrees during the first week and only one morning of temperatures near freezing, before temperatures dropped well below freezing on the 10th and 12th. Details on why severe damage may have occurred can be found at: sacvalleyorchards.com/blog/walnuts-blog/november-2020-freeze.

Below are descriptions of the freeze surveying and reporting being performed by County Agricultural Commissioners, the USDA Farm Service Agency, and UC Cooperative Extension.

Agricultural Commissioners in Butte, Glenn, and Tehama Counties initiated grower surveys in spring 2021 to assess if a crop disaster declaration was warranted. The Butte County Agricultural Commissioner's Office concluded that the county did not meet the 30% crop loss or tree loss needed to file a damage assessment report with the CDFA and CalOES. At the time of this writing, surveys in Glenn and Tehama Counties are ongoing. County Agricultural Commissioner's offices in Sutter, Yuba, Colusa, Yolo, Solano, and Sacramento Counties did not receive sufficient grower reports of freeze damage to warrant conducting surveys.

The USDA Farm Services Agency (FSA) encourages walnut growers who experienced losses from the 2020 autumn freeze to report losses to their local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office:

County	USDA Farm Services Agency (FSA) Phone Number
Tehama	(530) 691-5867
Glenn	(530) 934-4601
Butte	(530) 534-0112 ext. 2
Sutter & Yuba	(530) 671-0850 ext. 2
Colusa	(530) 458-5131
Yolo	(530) 662-2037 ext. 2
Solano	(707) 448-0106 ext. 2
Sacramento	(916) 714.1104 ext. 2

FSA Service Center Locator at: offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app

These are the two USDA FSA programs you may qualify to apply for.

Disaster Assistance

Eligible orchardists, vineyardists, and nursery tree growers may be eligible for cost-share assistance through the [Tree Assistance Program](#) (TAP) to rehabilitate or replant and clean-up damage to orchards and vineyards that kill or damage the tree, vines or shrubs. For TAP, a program application must be filed 90 calendar days after the disaster event or the date when the loss is apparent.

Risk Management

Producers who have risk protection through [Federal Crop Insurance](#) or FSA's [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program](#) (NAP) should report crop damage to their crop insurance agent or FSA office. If they have crop insurance, producers should report crop damage to their agent within 72 hours of damage discovery and follow up in writing within 15 days. For NAP covered crops, a [Notice of Loss](#) (CCC-576) must be filed within 15 days of the loss becoming apparent, except for hand-harvested crops, which should be reported within 72 hours. NAP or Federal Crop Insurance often only covers the crop and not the plant.

Information courtesy of Brooke Raffaele, Public Affairs & Outreach Coordinator at the California Farm Service Agency USDA.

UC Cooperative Extension researchers will also be conducting a walnut freeze damage survey. This online survey will ask about the orchard characteristics and grower practices surrounding freeze damaged orchards, with the hope of refining best practices for preventing future freeze damage. Look out for this survey from your local orchard advisor as well as at sacvalleyorchards.com later this summer. Finally, save the date for a Zoom webinar tentatively scheduled for **Wednesday, September 1st from 4-5:30 PM** when Luke Milliron will be hosting a panel of UC researchers and walnut growers to share their experience and lessons learned in preventing sudden autumn freeze damage.