Since mid-July, blazing temperatures have caused an incredible amount of livestock deaths and crop losses, creating problems for many farmers including how to dispose of dead animals during a time when renderers are processing at capacity.

State government officials announced Friday that it is imperative that California farmers contact their county agricultural commissioners to report livestock, poultry and plant crop losses.

"It is important for each agricultural commissioner to get this information so that we can request to be designated as a disaster county as far as animal loss or crop loss goes," said William Appleby, Tulare County assistant agricultural commissioner/sealer. "Usually within 60 days following an event, whether it was a heat spell, hail, rain or whatever that caused the damage, that is when we must submit and ask for a federal disaster declaration through the state Governor's Office of Emergency Services."

Once the counties collect the data, the information will be forwarded to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"It is of importance to each individual producer who is affected that everybody cooperate so that we have legitimate information to share with offices who need that information in order to help the industry," said Ria de Grassi, California Farm Bureau Federation director of livestock and animal health and welfare.

To participate in the voluntary animal mortality reporting, livestock producers who suffered losses should be prepared to provide their agricultural commissioner with information such as the number of animals picked up by a dead animal hauler, number of animals composted on the dairy or farm, and number of animals buried on the farm. It is suggested that producers contact counties with this information for the month of July and again in August.
To help submit a report to your county agricultural commissioner, go to [www.cfbf.com/pdf/AnimalMortalities.pdf](http://www.cfbf.com/pdf/AnimalMortalities.pdf)

Ranchers throughout the San Joaquin Valley lost thousands of cattle, primarily from dairies that took the brunt of the livestock losses. It will be several weeks before actual numbers are determined.

Michael Marsh, chief executive officer of Western United Dairymen, said that losses to the state's dairy sector could exceed $1 billion. The organization has contacted state and federal government officials to request disaster assistance for dairy producers.

"The economic repercussions of the heat experienced in the past few weeks are widespread and will be felt by California's dairy farm families for many months to come," said Marsh. "We don't have the loss quantified yet because some of it is going to be projected into the next year, but we know that the industry's losses are going to be extraordinary."

Producers are reporting heat-related production drops of 10 percent to 40 percent, he said. The loss stems not just from a drop in milk production, but also from the high number of heat-related deaths in many herds. There will be long-term effects from the heat wave, as cows that experienced stress early in their lactation will not fully recover until the next lactation. Additionally, there will be untold numbers of cows that will not be bred in time to calve again in 9 to 12 months, further extending the time until production returns to normal.

"Because our producers' milk production is going to be off, they are not going to be able to benefit from a higher national milk price to the extent that folks outside of California are," Marsh said. "We hope that we don't lose too many markets and too many sales to companies outside the state. Our plants are running short of milk in some cases so they are actually looking to have to import some milk for some uses and that is not good for California producers. The quicker that we can get back on our feet the better."

Milton O'Haire of the Stanislaus County Agricultural Commissioners office said with only six rendering plants in the state, the prolonged heat created an incredible backlog.

"One renderer told us that the areas of Stanislaus and Merced counties lost about 300-400 cows a day, mostly dairy cattle. Talking to the renderers, and some have been in business for 30 years, they've never seen it this bad," he said.

The cost of disposal of large numbers of cattle is being borne by dairy producers. Typically, there is a $75 to $100 fee for trucks sent to the dairy, with an additional fee ranging from $20 to $55 for each carcass removed. It is expected that each dairy may be charged an additional fee for each animal buried in a landfill.

Poultry producers also took an incredible hit from the heat. Bill Mattos, California Poultry Federation president, confirmed that losses to poultry are well over 1 million pounds of birds.

"For some small producers, losses were up to 10 percent of their flocks at the time of extreme heat. We lost a lot of big turkeys and some chickens," he said.

On July 21, the California Environmental Protection Agency issued emergency animal disposal guidance for producers. This means producers in counties with emergency declarations are allowed to dispose of carcasses by methods other than rendering. These counties include Tulare, Fresno, Kings, Madera, Merced, Stanislaus and San Joaquin.

According to the guidelines available online at [www.cdfa.ca.gov](http://www.cdfa.ca.gov) if rendering capacity has been exceeded producers may dispose of animals at
commercial landfills. If condition of carcasses precludes transportation to the landfill, on-site composting is the next best solution. The final and least desirable solution is on-site burial.

During this time of information gathering, the government requests that farmers with crop losses call their county agricultural commissioners.

"Anytime growers think they have losses, we ask that they call us so that we can be alerted to the problem. If the growers or producers don't let us know, then we won't know to go out and look," Appleby said.

Several crops have also been impacted by the high temperatures, including peaches, plums, nectarines, walnuts and pistachios. Walnut growers say the intense heat caused trees to show a yellow color, which is an indication of sunburn. The longer the hot weather continues, the more damage will occur. Growers won't know the total amount of damage until harvest.

Strawberry and tomato growers are closely monitoring their crops as well, and processing tomato growers are reporting heat-related problems.

"This is the hottest season really that we've got on record at least in the processing tomato industry," said California Tomato Growers Association President Ross Siragusa. "We've seen yields in fields that are currently being harvested drop by roughly 10 percent, but I'm not saying the entire state's yields are going to drop 10 percent, just the fields that are currently being harvested (southern Fresno and Kings counties)."

There is a combination of tomatoes that are basically too ripe and those that are not ripe.

"Going forward, we will probably see a reduced yield especially in September because the plants that are currently setting fruit are at a critical stage," Siragusa said. "They will lose flowers and that means there will be less fruit on that plant and the fruit isn't gaining any size, so you are likely to see smaller tomatoes when they are harvested."

Prune trees shut down in hot weather causing the fruit to stop gaining sugar content. This could reduce the size of the crop, which is already developing about two weeks late because of spring weather. The heat won't help advance harvest time, which is estimated to start Aug. 22. The crop is spotty, as some growers have a good size crop while others have none or a very small one, as a result of differing amounts of rain at bloom time.

Some sunburn was experienced in figs, according to California Fig Advisory Board President Richard Matoian. He said growers lost fruit from the first picking since it got too hot too fast. Growers were able to dry or process sunburned figs so they did not suffer a total loss, however these figs will not provide as much income as the fresh market. The second crop picking begins in early August.

Lettuce is another crop susceptible to sunburn, however Joann Greathead of the Central California Lettuce Cooperative, said it is too early to tell what damage has occurred in lettuce varieties.

With strawberries, Carolyn O'Donnell of the California Strawberry Commission said there is only minimal damage. When temperatures are hot, the fruit tends to ripen faster and crews cannot pick fast enough. Growers discard the overripe fruit for a loss.

Napa County winegrape grower Cio Perez said his area has experienced temperatures as high as 110 degrees.

"Hot temperatures caused just a slight burning in some areas, but nothing that is truly going to effect much in regards to the harvest," Perez said. "During those hot spells these vines basically shut themselves down and go into kind of a protective mode, so the leaves shut down so that there
is a minimum evaporation caused and not much movement as far as continuing to mature the fruit."

Farm Bureau has distributed thousands of Spanish language booklets that help farmers and ranchers educate their workers to stay safe during periods of high temperatures. To obtain copies of the brochures free of charge, click on heatstress@cfbf.com and indicate the quantity that you may need and the address where you would like them sent.

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