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## **Walnut Bargaining Association Asks Handlers to Hold Off on Setting Prices**

*Sacramento, CA* -- The Board of the Walnut Bargaining Association (WBA) met last month in Sacramento to discuss the outlook for this year's walnut crop. Traditionally, this is the time of year when the industry begins to hear estimates from handlers about prices growers can expect to receive for their walnuts. But this year, the WBA is hoping to delay these decisions.

"So much is still uncertain at this time," said Pete Jelavich, WBA member from Yuba City. "The California Ag Statistics Service (CASS) has set the [pre-season crop estimate](#) at 720,000 tons, but many growers believe recent weather events since the estimate was released will reduce yields. We're also waiting to learn more about global supply conditions and about the volume and quality of last year's crop is still available for sale. Both of these factors will play a major role in the price we'll receive for our walnuts for the new season."

In general, grower prices for walnuts have been at record lows for the past few years. And while the WBA doesn't expect things to change dramatically this year, they are cautiously optimistic that things will improve a bit over last year.

According to WBA statistics, last year's CASS estimate was way off its pre-season estimate of a 670,000-ton crop. The actual crop was significantly larger and eventually came in at 730,000 tons. As a result, actual prices for walnuts were dramatically lower than what was predicted in early fall.

"This year, we could very likely have the opposite scenario," said Jonathan Field, Executive Director of the WBA. "The CASS crop estimate is just slightly below last year's actual crop, but the report indicated far fewer nuts per tree and kernel weights that are much lighter than normal. As a result, the crop may come in lighter than predictions, which would hopefully drive prices up."

"The WBA has sent a [letter](#) to handlers asking them not to jump the gun on setting walnut prices until we know more about the crop size and for some of the unstable market conditions to settle a bit," said Jelavich. "Growers need to receive higher prices for our walnuts than we

have for the past few years. So, we're asking handlers to work with us and wait until we know more."

According to Jelavich, the whole reason for the existence of the WBA is to improve grower pricing. But many walnut farmers don't even know the WBA exists. To combat that, the WBA has recently launched a new [website](#) and is funding a series of ads in walnut growing trade publications to help raise awareness about the WBA and what it's all about.

In short, the WBA is a grower-owned cooperative whose only goal is to help farmers get a fair price for walnuts. They do this by providing walnut farmers with accurate data, global market intelligence and information about actual prices walnut farmers receive from handlers.

"Each year, the WBA collects information about the prices our members have received for their walnuts," says the WBA's Field. "This information doesn't come from coffee shop talk. We get it by collecting pay stubs that growers receive from their handlers."

Grower pricing information submitted to the WBA is confidential. Name, address and ranch information on pay stubs is redacted to ensure anonymity. Specific information on handler names is also not made public. But the pricing information gathered by the WBA is the most accurate available anywhere. It gives WBA members a really good idea if the price they received was in line with the industry average or below it.

"In many cases, the WBA pricing report has empowered our members to go back to their handler and secure an enhanced payment," said Field. "Our goal is to help make grower prices more transparent and to hold handlers accountable for paying farmers the right price."

The WBA is embarking on a membership drive in an effort to help all walnut growers receive better prices.

"The more walnut farmers we have in our membership, the more accurate our pricing information will be and the greater unity we'll have as a walnut farming community," he said. "Joining the WBA might be the most important thing a walnut farmer can do to improve prices for walnuts."

The cost to join the WBA is \$2 per ton. In addition to information on prices received from handlers, the WBA provides a host of additional economic and market intelligence that is very difficult to get elsewhere. This includes information on sales, supply-demand issues, trade market pricing, quality, and other global economic trends.

To learn more about the information provided by WBA, growers can register [here](#) to receive a sample of WBA reports. The new WBA [website](#) includes much more information about the WBA and its benefits of members. Growers can also hear testimonials from fellow walnut growers [here](#) and [here](#).