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**Rain in Idaho-E. Oregon delays onion harvest but crop appears largely OK**

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By

Kathleen Thomas Gaspar

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Heavy rains from Hurricane Hilary swept through the western United States earlier this week, with more than three inches in some parts of Idaho-eastern Oregon's onion production area.

While harvest delay is being reported by growers in the region and a gap in production is expected, severe damage to the crop appeared to be limited, according to an Aug. 23 statement by Marc Bybee, chairman of the Idaho-E. Oregon Onion Promotion Board.

Bybee said, "On Aug. 21 and 22 heavy downpours of rain associated with Hurricane Hilary hit across the Treasure Valley. I've seen rain gauges at 1.5 inches and heard of 3.5 inches in some locations. I would not doubt that, but cannot substantiate it. There may have been some scattered small hail and a few strong gusts of wind."

Bybee went on to say, "While late-summer/early-fall rains are not uncommon, this was substantially more than the normal. Hopefully we do not see more until harvest ends. It has, without a doubt, put a delay in current onion harvest plans that could likely cause a gap in some packer's production needs. I have not seen, nor been made aware of, any onions destroyed by the storm. Delays are a short-term certainty."

Concurring with Bybee was onion grower Corey Maag, who serves both as president of the Malheur Onion Growers Association and chairman of the Idaho-E. Oregon Onion Committee. Maag said the system brought unusual weather, but he also said this year's crop was coming in later due to weather delays during planting season.

"My crop is a week behind and is still pretty green," Maag said. "Are my fields wetter than I'd like? Yes, but the crop is healthy enough to withstand it. We will likely have to delay when we start lifting, depending on the weather, but it's not a catastrophe."

Bybee said long-term consequences "are unknown at this time and could range from larger, improved yields to increased disease pressure on the storage crop. Nobody knows yet."

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Farmers in the Treasure Valley “will likely take precautionary steps to mitigate potential issues, an additional cost they were not hoping for,” Bybee said.

And Maag commented, “I expect my crop will be average, and the quality will be there. Right now we’re spraying with fungicide to mitigate any disease.”

Crews hope to return to fields within a week, and Bybee said the two-week forecast “looks very favorable to dry things up — but a short gap in supply is likely for some areas within the region”.

He said, “Today the sun is out and temperatures are slowly returning to normal. This was unusual weather for this region of the desert, for sure, but it is way too early to say it will influence the season.”

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## About Kathleen Thomas Gaspar |

Kathleen is a Colorado native and has been writing about produce for more than three decades and has been a professional journalist for more than four decades. Over the years she's covered a cornucopia of crops grown both in the United States and abroad, and she's visited dozens of states – traveling by car from her home base in Colorado to the Northwest and Southeast, as far as Vancouver, BC, and Homestead, FL. Now semi-retired, Kathleen continues to write about produce and is also penning an ongoing series of fiction novels. She's a wife, mother of two grown sons and grandmother of six, and she and her fly fisherman husband Abe reside in the Banana Belt town of Cañon City.

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