tions to reduce the number of sows farrowing during March-August by 3 percent from actual farrowings a year earlier. Pigs farrowed during this period reach slaughter weight in late 2000 and early 2001.

Hog prices are expected to average in the mid-$40's per cwt in 2001, about the same as this year and up over 30 percent from 1999. Competing meat supplies will continue to be large. In addition, some uncertainty remains about the continuing demand boost from the robust economy. If Federal Reserve actions cool the economy, meat demand will likely slow somewhat.

Retail pork prices are expected to climb 1-2 percent in 2001, following an expected rise of 5-6 percent in 2000. The projected rises follow 2 years of declining prices.

Poultry output is expected to remain strong in 2001, with increases forecast for broilers, turkeys, and eggs. Net returns for processors in all three sectors are relatively attractive in 2000, although prices for soybean meal—a major component of poultry feed—are above year-earlier levels. Returns will likely be dampened in 2001 as poultry prices decline somewhat.

Broiler production is expected to rise about 5 percent in 2001, near the 5-year average. Wholesale broiler prices are expected to decline slightly but average in the mid-50-cent-per-pound range. The export market remains the key to broiler prices. In recent years, robust export growth was dampened by economic problems in Asia and Russia. Economic conditions appear to be improving in those countries, and as broiler exports edge higher, prices will likely hold in the mid-50-cent range.

Turkey production is expected to increase about 1 percent in 2001, with prices expected to average slightly lower. Turkey processor returns were quite high in 1999, as soybean meal prices plummeted. But rising meal prices and slightly lower turkey prices have eroded returns in 2000. AO

For further information, contact:
Leland Southard, coordinator; Ron Gustafson, cattle; Leland Southard, hogs; Mildred Haley, world pork; Jim Miller, dairy; David Harvey, poultry and aquaculture. All are at (202) 694-5180.

Specialty Crops

Stone Fruit Supplies Likely to Rise in 2000

Favorable spring weather has led to what will likely be a strong crop of California stone fruits (peaches, nectarines, and plums) in 2000. California's stone fruit orchards—which account for most of U.S. stone fruit production—have received above-average rainfall, especially in February, the wettest on record with rainfall more than double the normal amount. Breaks in the rainfall, combined with good winds, allowed the blooms and orchard grounds to dry. Hence, fungicide application was not disrupted and blooms remained undamaged by the wet weather. Warm and sunny spring days during March allowed growers to work orchards with minimal disruption.

Winter 1999/2000 was milder than a year ago. In order for stone fruit trees to achieve dormancy during winter, they must have a sufficient number of chill hours (when the temperature remains below 45 degrees Fahrenheit). Trees that go through a full dormant stage usually produce strong fruit that is less susceptible to pests and diseases, less prone to bruising, and capable of a longer shelf life. According to the California Tree Fruit Agreement—a grower-funded organization that promotes fresh-market stone fruit—chill hours during the 1999/2000 winter totaled 897 compared with 1,331 chill hours the previous year, but still sufficient for the trees to achieve dormancy.

Timing of this season's California stone fruit development is ahead of normal compared with last season's late starts. Early varieties of nectarines, Mayglo in particular, were in full bloom by February 7, followed by Red Beaut plums on February 13. By late February, orchards were in full bloom, indicating a full crop for the year, and by the end of March, stone fruit trees were leafing out. Sunny weather toward the end of April has enabled growers to harvest some early-variety peaches and nectarines.

Favorable spring weather in California will lead to an increase in peach production. USDA forecasts total production of peaches in California (both freestone and cling varieties) to increase by 5 percent to 1.9 billion pounds in 2000. Total peach production was 1.8 billion pounds in 1999 and 1.7 billion in 1998.

Figures from the California Tree Fruit Agreement indicate that packout (number of 25-pound boxes harvested) of California stone fruit will be greater this year than last. Packout of peaches—both yellow- and whiteflesh varieties—is projected to rise by 2 percent over last year. Packouts of nectarines and plums are projected up by 4 percent and 5 percent from 1999.

Peaches account for over 80 percent of combined U.S. production of the three stone fruits. South Carolina and Georgia follow California's 73-percent share of peach production at a far distance, averaging about 6 and 5 percent of the U.S. total over the last 5 years. In 1999, a favorable growing season brought production in the two states to 160 and 110 million pounds, respectively. By the end of April 2000, 82 percent of South Carolina's peach crop and 79 percent of Georgia's peach crop appeared to be in good or excellent condition.

Grower prices for plums and nectarines were down in 1999 following recovery in production from 1998's heavy winter rains and spring hailstorms. Grower prices for peaches remained relatively stable. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1999 summer retail prices for peaches averaged 2 percent below 1998 but 11 percent above the average of the last 5 years (1994-98). During 2000, prices for fresh-market stone fruit will likely be about average, given increased supplies and good quality from this year's California harvest. AO

Thomas Worth (202) 694-5262
tworth@ers.usda.gov