Agriculture overview: Farming in Puerto Rico

The Caribbean island nation of Puerto Rico, which is in a commonwealth association with the USA, has just over 13,000 farms, according to the US Department of Agriculture's (USDA) latest census. Of these, 1,322 farms sold annual produce worth more than US$60,000 (R730,000) each.

The biggest production activity was coffee (3,425 farms) followed by fruit and coconut (3,350) and cattle (1,965). Coffee producers sold US$29.2 million (R354 million) of produce a year, while plantain farmers sold US$80.5 million (R976 million) worth of produce, according to census data. Dairy farmers output was US$189 million (R2.3 billion) and cattle farmers was US$33.6 million (R407.57 million), USDA said.

Puerto Rico boasts 96,000 head of cattle, 48,000 hogs and pigs, 12,500 sheep and 5,600 goats, according to USDA. A total of 339 farms produce rabbits with a total population of 15,900. – Staff reporter

Snow in drought-stricken Western US melts early

The snowpack on the US's western mountain region has started to melt earlier than usual this year, at the same time as a crippling drought continues to grip states in the country's west.

"Almost all of the West Coast continues to have record low snowpack," Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) hydrologist, David Green, said. "March was warm and dry in most of the west. As a result, snow is melting earlier than usual."

There was little snow accumulation in March and much of the existing snow has already melted, the US Department of Agriculture agency said.

In western states, including California, Nevada and Arizona, snowmelt accounts for the majority of seasonal water supply, the NRCS said.

"A consequence of the early snowmelt is that western states will have reduced streamflow later this spring and summer," the statement read. – Staff reporter

Canada boosts competitiveness of soya beans

The Canadian government will invest C$225 000 (R2.2 million) in its agriculture department's scientists to work with the Canadian Soybean Exporters' Association to help boost the global competitiveness of food-grade soya beans, according to a statement from the department.

Soya beans are a rapidly expanding crop in Canada and a key crop in Essex County," said Jeff Watson, the member of parliament for Essex County. "This investment will help ensure the long-term prosperity of the sector.

Soya beans are currently the fourth-largest crop by land planted and return C$2.4 billion (R23 billion) to Canadian farmers, according to Soy Canada. – Staff reporter