

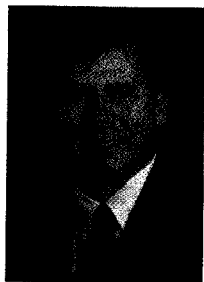
# HIGH NUMBER OF PISTACHIO BLANKS WARM WINTER, DROUGHT WREAK HAVOC

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**S**OME CALIFORNIA pistachio growers are seeing as much as 70% blanks (shells with no nuts inside) on their trees this year, according to Richard Matoian, executive director of American Pistachio Growers.

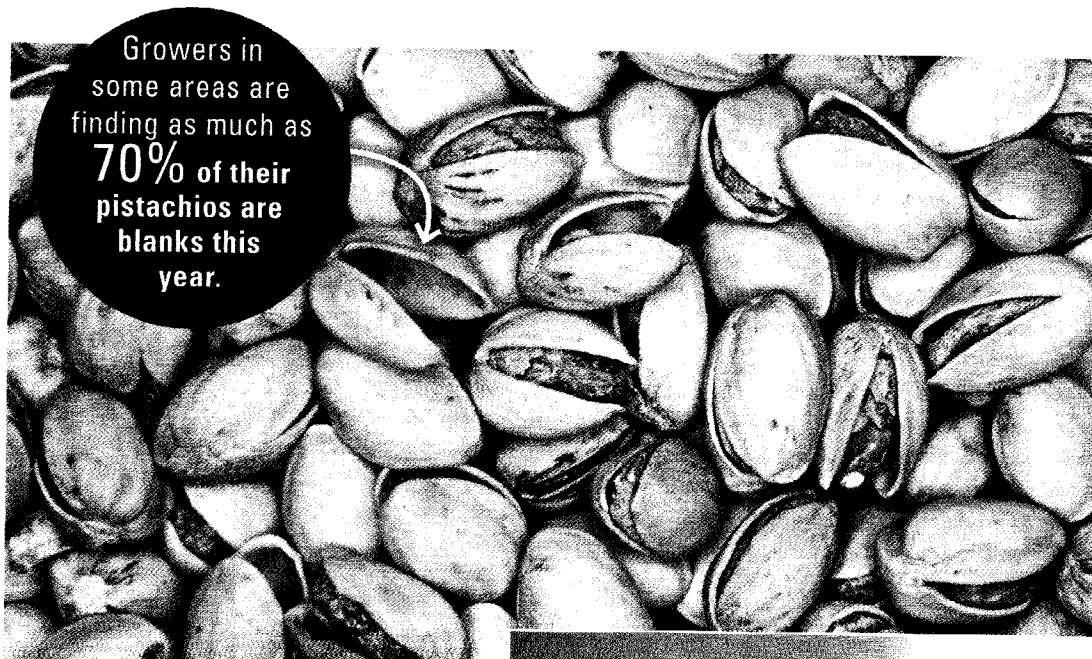
Pistachios are an alternate-bearing crop, and this year is an off year, "but even for a typical off year or low production, it's lower than people had expected," Matoian says.

There are always a certain percentage of blanks each year (roughly 10%), but this year, the percentage is much higher, and it's believed the drought and an unusually warm winter are to blame.



**Richard Matoian**

"Pistachios, like other deciduous fruits and nuts, require a certain amount of cold temperatures during the wintertime to satisfy dormant rest," Matoian says. "If they don't get enough chill hours, what ends up happening for pistachios is the male and female trees don't bloom at the same time, and when they don't bloom at the same time, the pistachio nuts are not fertilized and don't produce a viable nut."



Growers in some areas are finding as much as **70%** of their pistachios are blanks this year.

While pistachios are relatively drought-tolerant trees, lack of water in key periods can lead to blanking, too. "The shell forms first and hardens, and then at a later period of time, the nut fills the inside of the shell," Matoian explains. "If you don't have enough water at that particular point in time, it won't fill."

Because this year's harvest is still ongoing, Matoian hesitates to say this is the worst case of blanking he's ever seen, but it does appear to be pretty bad, at least for certain growers. "But I don't know what it's going to be overall until we get figures back from the marketing order on the crop totals," he says.

Pistachio prices could increase, too, particularly if worldwide demand remains high, as expected. "The one fortunate thing is that we have a larger-than-normal carryover of product from the 2014



crop," Matoian says. "So we're starting off with a slightly higher amount than we would normally."

He adds that the number of bearing acres of pistachios has grown significantly over the last decade — from 105,000 acres in 2005 to 225,000 acres today. "It's become a crop that many growers are considering," he says. ●

Jeffries is a freelance writer and former managing editor of *American Fruit Grower*® and *Western Fruit Grower*® magazines.