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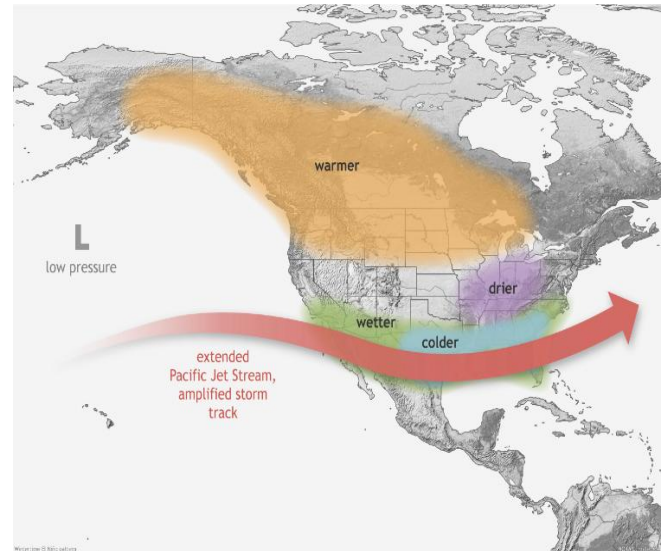
Central Valley Milk Notes Issue 3 - 2026 Fresno, Madera & Kings

A Strong El Niño Is Building: Why It Matters for California Dairies

Daniela Bruno, UCCE Fresno, Madera & Kings Counties

California dairy producers should prepare now for the possibility of a very strong El Niño during the 2026–27 winter. On September 21, 2026, Governor Gavin Newsom proclaimed a state of emergency to strengthen statewide preparedness for a potentially historic El Niño event.

A strong El Niño does not mean every dairy will experience flooding, but it can increase the likelihood of significant storms and wetter conditions. For dairy producers, the key question is not exactly how much rain will fall, but whether dairies are prepared for heavy or repeated storms. Preparing now, before the first major storm, can reduce disruptions when conditions become difficult.



Source: [NOAA Climate.gov](https://www.noaa.gov/).

Lessons From 2022–2023



Source: [www.TheBulvine.com](https://www.thebulvine.com/)

The winter of 2022–2023 reminds us how quickly conditions can change. After years of drought, California experienced a series of powerful atmospheric rivers from

late 2022 through spring 2023. The storms brought intense rainfall, record Sierra Nevada snowpack, flooding, road closures, erosion, and widespread damage to agricultural areas. In the San Joaquin Valley, repeated storms also contributed to the re-emergence of Tulare Lake.

Dairy operations faced challenges with livestock movement, road and farm access, feed deliveries, infrastructure, and moving cattle out of flooded or vulnerable areas.

The lesson is not that another winter like 2022–23 is inevitable. Rather, conditions can change quickly, and repeated storms can compound problems when roads, drainage systems, feed supplies, and other infrastructure have not recovered between events.

The current forecast offers an opportunity to prepare before the ground becomes saturated and access becomes more difficult.

Prepare Before the Ground Gets Muddy

A few hours of preparation before a major storm can prevent much larger problems later. Walk the dairy now and look for areas where heavy rain, flooding, or power outages could disrupt daily operations.

Roads & Farm Access

Check: Farm roads, entrances, low-lying areas, and other weak spots.

- Repair damaged roads and clear obstructions that prevent water from draining.
- Identify alternate routes if the primary road becomes unusable.
- Consider access for milk trucks, feed deliveries, employees, and emergency vehicles during repeated storms.

Livestock, Housing & Animal Health

Check: Barns, calf housing, roofs, fences, gates, and areas where cattle may be exposed to standing water or mud.

- Make sure cattle have access to dry, well-drained areas.
- Identify temporary housing or relocation options for calves, fresh cows, sick animals, and other vulnerable cattle.
- Monitor cattle closely during wet conditions, which can increase problems with cleanliness, foot health, lameness, and mastitis.

Emergency Planning & Communication

Check: Emergency contacts, response plans, evacuation routes, and employee responsibilities.

- Keep contact information for employees, veterinarians, feed suppliers, milk haulers, utilities, and emergency services accessible to key employees.
- Make sure employees know evacuation routes, where animals can be moved, and who is responsible for making emergency decisions.
- Monitor weather forecasts and changing conditions so the dairy can respond quickly when action is needed.

The Bottom Line

A few hours of preparation now can prevent major disruptions later. The goal is not to predict the exact winter ahead; it is to ensure your dairy is ready for a range of conditions.

Feed, Supplies & Power

Check: Hay, silage, bedding, veterinary supplies, fuel, generators, and other critical supplies.

- Maintain adequate inventories before storms arrive.
- Identify alternate suppliers and delivery routes if roads become inaccessible.
- Test generators and backup power systems and make sure adequate fuel is available.

Drainage & Water

Check: Drains, ditches, culverts, ponds, reservoirs, berms, pumps, and outlets.

- Clear drainage structures and make sure they can handle heavy rainfall and runoff.
- Identify where stormwater could enter livestock housing, feed storage, or manure-storage areas.
- Stage pumps, pipes, sandbags, and other supplies needed to manage excess water.
- After major storms, check livestock water supplies for sediment or other changes that could affect water quality or access.

Daniela Bruno, DVM, PhD
UCCE Dairy Advisor – Fresno, Madera & Kings Counties
dfbruno@ucanr.edu
559-241-7552

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