



A TRACTOR sprays herbicide between rows of almond trees at a farm in Modesto. California produces about 80% of the world's supply.

No joy for the state's almond growers

One conglomerate has filed for bankruptcy as low prices drive industry into a slump.

By IAN JAMES

For much of the last decade, almonds have been such a lucrative crop that growers and investment firms have poured money into planting orchards across vast stretches of California farmland. Now the almond boom has fizzled, and the industry has entered a slump. Prices have dropped over the last several years, and the state's total almond acreage has begun to decrease as growers tear out orchards and plant other crops. In a sign of the troubles besetting the industry, one almond-growing conglomerate has declared bankruptcy.

In a series of Chapter 11 filings in federal bankruptcy court, Trinitas Farming and other affiliated companies said record-low almond prices and high interest rates contributed to their "serious liquidity constraints."

The group of companies said in a court document filed Feb. 19 that they own 7,856 acres of almond orchards in five counties: Solano, Contra Costa, San Joaquin, Fresno and Tulare. As part of the bankruptcy proceedings, these orchards are expected to be put up for sale.

"When the price is low, now we start seeing the results of it. And certainly the fear is that Trinitas is the tip of the iceberg," said Jake Wenger, general manager of the Salida Hulling Assn., which runs an almond-hulling plant in Modesto.

Prices for premium almonds have dropped from nearly \$4 a pound a decade ago to about \$2 a pound or less, Wenger said. Though the low prices are affecting

[See Almonds, A9]

The new workplace vocabulary

'Quiet quitting' and other terms reflect employee effort to exert power

By SAMANTHA MASUNAGA AND SEAN GREENE

Abygail Liera sympathized when she first read about people who were "quiet quitting," refusing to go above and beyond at their jobs.

But it wasn't until a few months later that she understood.

The Winnetka resident got a new boss and was expected to train him, but when she asked for a raise, she said she was told, "We'll see." Her boss discouraged open and honest feedback, making her work environment feel toxic and disrespectful.

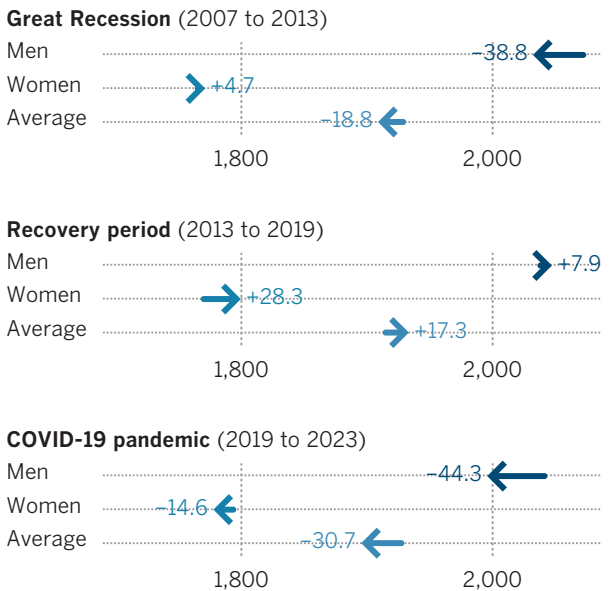
"I remember reading it, and I'm like, 'Damn, this sucks that people have to go through this,'" Liera, 32, said of the news article on quiet quitting. "At the same time, I was like, 'Oh, I don't know what that feels like.' But now I do."

Since the pandemic, work-related phrases such as "quiet quitting" and "Great Resignation" have taken over the internet — and are now part of our everyday vocabulary. Social

After the pandemic, employed men reduced their annual work hours by about one week

Between 2019 and 2023, employed men opted to work 44 fewer hours in a year. Women reduced their annual work hours by 14.

Change in average annual hours worked



IPUMS Current Population Survey; Analysis by economist Yongseok Shin of Washington University in St. Louis

Los Angeles Times

media are filled with work-related memes and videos that describe "rage applying" or "lazy girl jobs." People share tips on Reddit about how to effectively — and surreptitiously — "poly-work," or hold multiple jobs at the same time.

This proliferation of workplace lingo is more than a fad: It's a viral language showing how workers are trying to hold on to the power they suddenly gained during the pandemic, workplace experts say.

After March 2020, workers were able to leverage the tight labor market to get what they want. But recent layoffs across a number of industries have shown that the balance of power between employee and employer today is, at best, a constantly tilting seesaw.

The job cuts and mandatory return-to-office policies imply that companies are gaining the upper hand on their employees, yet the persistence of hybrid work policies may show that workers have made a permanent mark on how work gets done in the future.

Employment data suggest that a growing number

[See Working, A7]

Hearing turns into proxy campaign

Lawmakers take sides for Biden or Trump as special counsel sticks to report on president.

By ZEKE MILLER, COLLEEN LONG AND FARNOUSH AMIRI

WASHINGTON — Lawmakers turned a hearing on President Biden's handling of classified documents into a proxy battle between the Democratic president and Republican front-runner Donald Trump on Tuesday, as a newly released transcript of Biden's testimony last fall showed that he repeatedly insisted he never meant to retain classified information after he left the vice presidency.



JACQUELYN MARTIN AP
ROBERT HUR angered both parties with Biden's classified records report.

Special counsel Robert Hur, testifying for more than four hours before the House Judiciary Committee, stood steadfastly by the assessments in his 345-page report that questioned Biden's age and mental competence, but

[See Hearing, A6]

Aid ship sets sail for Gaza Strip

Vessel is carrying 200 tons of food that the World Central Kitchen plans to distribute in the north. **WORLD, A3**

Machine gets batters in swing

Dodgers hitters have become fans of a device that mimics big league pitchers. **SPORTS, B10**

Inflation inches up in February

Prices rise 0.4% from January, faster than the previous month's growth. **BUSINESS, A8**

Weather
Partly sunny.
L.A. Basin: 71/50. **B6**

For the latest news, go to latimes.com.



Seeing red over this Flamin' Hot snack

California bill would ban food items with certain synthetic dyes from public schools.

By NATHAN SOLIS AND CINDY CARCAMO

The days of Flamin' Hot Cheetos in California schools may be numbered.

A new bill aims to ban from public schools food products that contain artificial dyes, including the ingredient that makes Cheetos pop with their signature yellow and red colors.

Lawmakers argue that developing young minds are harmed by the chemical ingredients and that federal guidelines have not been updated in decades.

STATE'S BATTLE OVER COVID REFUND

Lawmakers ask FEMA to reimburse cities and counties \$300 million for homeless housing.

By ANDREA CASTILLO

WASHINGTON — California cities and counties might be on the hook for more than \$300 million they spent placing thousands of homeless residents in hotels in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the time, local officials made the unprecedented move under the impression that the federal government would reimburse much of their cost for offering shelter, without time limits, to unhoused people at elevated risk of severe symptoms. But the Federal Emergency Management Agency says that they were mistaken and that the agency had agreed to pay only for hotel stays of up to 20 days.

Now, concerned members of the California delegation want answers. A Monday letter by Rep. Robert Garcia (D-Long Beach), signed by 34 other Democratic members and one Republican — Rep. David Valadao of Hanford — asks FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell to reconsider and reimburse cities that are already strapped for cash.

"We're talking about the single largest loss-of-life event that we've had to go through in over a generation," Garcia said. "This idea that we're not going to, in this massive emergency, fully reimburse cities and counties for housing folks ... is crazy. FEMA has a responsibility to fix this problem."

Los Angeles stands to lose out on \$60 million spent from its general fund, nearly a third of the \$194 million submitted to FEMA for reimbursement. The city already faces hiring limits due to a budget shortfall.

"Every dollar would help us fill some of those vacancies," assistant city administrative officer Ben Ceja said.

The issue stems from a letter sent Oct. 16 from FEMA Regional Administrator Robert Fenton to Nancy Ward, the director of

[See FEMA, A12]



Every story. Every section. Every feature. Subscribers get unlimited app access. Download now.

