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Farmland wiped out by waters

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ST. GEORGE -- Southwestern Utah farmers who prayed for rain after a six-year drought depleted crop yields were cursing their bad fortune this week. And local agriculturalists are predicting some growers will never recover from the flood.

The Santa Clara River washed away 15 acres of fertile soil from St. George alfalfa grower Orwin Gubler, who also lost a manger and several horse corrals.

Others lost vehicles, equipment and animals.

The river also ruined a recently installed irrigation system, leaving several local families with no way to water crops that survived the torrents.

A deep layer of silt covered parts of Gubler's farm, as well as that of his next-door neighbor, Barton Imlay.

Where Gubler once had fertile topsoil butting up to the riverbank, "we now have a big channel," he said. "I just don't know what we're going to do."

In some cases, land lost to the flood may never be reclaimed, said Vernon Parent, Utah State University extension agent.

"A lot of this land is deeded with the use of the stream as a barrier," Parent said. "Now the stream is 100 feet wider or more."

Parent said that many farmers will find it difficult to recover from the loss of territory and soil. "You can rebuild a home, but you cannot rebuild the land," he said.

Though some relief may be available from the government, it is unlikely to cover actual losses, federal officials said Thursday.

And any monetary help is weeks, if not months, off.

Meanwhile, officials are warning that more woes may be in store for local growers because the snowpack in Washington County's watershed is more than 300 percent of normal, said Lynn Kitchen, an official for the U.S. **Natural Resources Conservation Service**.

Kitchen said it is important to strengthen the banks near valuable farmland soon.

Local farmers, however, complained the federal government takes too much time to give them permission to do what is needed to protect their land.

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