

Car plunges into Salinas cauliflower field

Leigh Cooper 4:01 p.m. PST December 10, 2014



(Photo: The Salinas Californian)

Jaime Rios, public information officer for the Monterey office of the California Highway Patrol.

Merrill Farms is used to cars ending up in their crops. A vehicle collision Wednesday morning was not the first to interrupt the farming at the Merrill Farms fields at the intersection of Portola Drive and Reservation Road.

"The damage will be fairly minimal. We have had others drive into the field," said John Bramers, food safety and compliance officer at Merrill Farms.

A Honda Odyssey driven by a 50-year-old woman and travelling west on Reservation Road failed to maintain a turn on a curve about a quarter mile west of Portola and skidded into an oncoming BMW at 7:45 a.m., said

The 22-year-old man driving the BMW was transported to Natividad Medical Center for a possible broken left leg, stated Rios. The woman had no substantial injuries.

The BMW slid down an embankment, landing at the edge of a recently transplanted field of cauliflower. The car stopped on a dirt road at the edge of the field, explained Bramers, and the crash will only affect the plants on the fringe of the crop.

"[Spilled automotive] fluids were contained to the road or on the field road," said Bramers. "The biggest concerns will be glass." County of Monterey Public Works was dispatched to clean up fluids in the road.

Merrill Farms will create a 15-foot buffer zone from where the BMW landed and search the area for glass and plastic shards from the car. Contaminants like that cannot end up on someone's dinner plate or even at a processing plant, Bramers said.

The plants are still very small and not scheduled for harvest for roughly 90 days. "It will be much easier to evaluate being that we are so far from harvest," Bramers said.

If chemicals had made their way into the field, it is the farmer's responsibility to contact the Monterey County Environmental Health Bureau and the Agricultural Commissioner, he explained.

"We follow up with the farmer to make sure they disc (plow under) the field and remove the area from production," said Bruce Weldon, supervisor of the hazardous material management service at the bureau. "If there is a contamination, we want to get that out of there so it does not contaminate future crops."

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