

MERCED COUNTY AGRICULTURE

Maxwell Norton
UC Cooperative Extension

With a raw product value of over 2 billion dollars, agriculture is Merced County's number one industry and is the county's largest employer. Production agriculture employs 21% of the county's residents. When you include food processing, Ag employs 33% of the workforce.

Dollar-wise, Merced is the fifth largest Ag County in the state and sixth in the nation.

Because of our Mediterranean climate, productive soils and water distribution system, our farmers produce over 110 different agricultural products on the approximately 1.1 million acres of farm and rangeland in the county. Many of the commercial crops grown in the U.S. can be found in Merced County. Examples would include: beans, corn, cotton, pasture, rice, safflower, sorghum, wheat, firewood, seed crops, melons, peas, peppers, sweet potatoes, apricots, figs, kiwifruit, olives, pistachios, prunes, cherries, hatching eggs, goat milk, wool, beeswax, bulk bees, chickens, goats, turkeys, fish, hogs, and the list goes on and on.

Due to our well-trained farmers and allied professionals, with the help of an ideal climate, Merced County is known for high quality of its Ag products as well as our good yields. Extensive monitoring of pesticide usage, strict enforcement of the agricultural codes, and great concern by the farmers assures a food supply that is among the safest in the world.

Merced County, situated near the geographical center of the state, is a gently sloping alluvial plain in the center of the great San Joaquin Valley, which is considered one of the world's most important agricultural regions. Covering 1,984 square miles, the county is only 80 square miles smaller than the state of Delaware. Approximately 82% of the land is in farms or ranches. The Sierra Nevada watershed, Shasta Lake via the state and federal water projects, and ground water, provide irrigation for one-half million acres of land. This irrigation water is critical to the economic well being of the area because our desert climate only affords an average of 10.8 inches of rainfall per year, which almost all falls in the winter.

Another unique aspect of the Central Valley weather is the infamous Tule fog. While being a hindrance to transportation, the fog provides the many "chill hours" below 45°F, which are needed, for almost all fruit and nut trees to bloom normally and set a crop. Without this winter fog, the multi-billion dollar fruit and nut industry in the Central Valley would not exist.

Because of our high quality, ample production and proximity of major shipping points, Merced County products are exported all over the world to over 50 countries. Products are shipped to China, Eastern Europe, South America, Japan, former Communist Block countries, Canada, Mexico, various Pacific Rim nations and elsewhere. In addition, internationally known food processors have located in the county in order to better take advantage of our agricultural productivity and diversity.

Merced County is the home to some of the world's largest food processors and packers, who serve as some of our largest employers. Notable examples are the largest winery in the world-E & J Gallo and Foster Farms-the largest single poultry processing plant in the world. Other examples include:

Ingomar Packing Co.	-----processed tomato products
Morningstar Foods Inc.	-----peach and tomato processing
Hilmar Cheese Co., Joseph Farms, Peluso Cheese Inc. and Beatrice Cheese Inc.	-----cheese processing
Oasis Foods Inc.	-----canned figs and specialty fruit
Sun Garden-Gangi Canning Co.	-----dried beans and processed tomatoes

Dole Packaged Frozen Foods-----frozen, canned and vacuum-packed foods
 Anderson Almonds/Wertzba Place, CA Independent Almond Growers-----almond processing
 Central Valley Processing, Del Rio Nut Company, Ryan Parreira Almond Co.-----almond processing
 Gold Hills Nut Co. Inc., Hilltop Ranch Inc.-----almond processing
 Minturn Nut Co., Nunes Farms-----almond processing
 Buchanan Hollow Nut Co.-----pistachio processing
 Pustateri Nut Co., Anderson Nut Co-----walnut processing
 Rogers Foods Inc.-----dehydrated vegetables
 Arnold Meat Co., Richwood Meat Co., Wolfsen's Meat & Sausage-----meat packing
 Calvert, Pheasant, C.J. Mac's Beef Jerky-----specialty meat processing
 Safeway-----specialty processed foods
 E & J Gallo-----winery
 AND MANY MORE

In addition, there are many packers who ship fresh commodities such as sweet potatoes, tomatoes, melons, bell peppers, onions, dried fruit and other products all over the continent.

Agriculture, as with any basic industry, generates most of its economic wealth after the product leaves the farm gate. Goods and services are purchased by the farmer from a wide variety of enterprises, which in turn purchase from others. The largest multiplier of economic growth is in the form of packing, processing, packaging, transporting and marketing agricultural products. If one were to assume an economic multiplier factor of 3.0 for Merced County, then one can assume that the over 2.2 billion dollar gross farm gate value generates more than 6.6 billion dollars of economic growth for the local economy.

With proper protection and nurturing, agriculture will continue to be a major source of economic wealth for the region for many years to come.

For more information about agriculture, please contact the following agencies:
 Or visit these websites: <http://cemerced.ucdavis.edu> or www.co.merced.ca.us/ag

Merced County Chamber of Commerce 860 West 18 th Street PO BOX 1112 Merced, CA 95341 Phone: (209) 722-3864 Fax: (209) 722-2406 http://mercedcountychamber.com	Merced County Department of Agriculture 2139 Wardrobe Avenue Merced, CA 95341 Phone: (209) 385-7431 Fax: (209) 725-3910 www.co.merced.ca.us/ag
Merced County Farm Bureau 646 South Hwy 59 Merced, CA 95341 PO BOX 1232 Merced, CA 95341 Phone: (209) 723-3001 Fax: (209) 722-3814 E-mail: mcfb@pacbell.net Website: http://www.cfbf.com/counties/?id=24	UC Cooperative Extension 2145 Wardrobe Avenue Merced, CA 95341 Phone: (209) 385-7403 Fax: (209) 722-8856 E-mail: cemerced@ucdavis.edu Website: http://cemerced.ucdavis.edu

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