

## Imperial County Agriculture



Fresh market carrots



Thinning cantaloupes



Field harvesting broccoli



Harvesting Wheat



Cattle Feedlot



Colorado water delivery



Field packing 'Sweet Imperial' onions



Field packing of honeydew melons



Alfalfa hay bale

## Imperial County Overview

### The Weather

Winters are mild and dry with daily maximum temperatures in the 65 to 75°F (18-24°C). Summers are extremely hot with daily maximum temperatures of 104 to 115°F (40-46°C). The annual rainfall is just over 3 inches (7.5 cm) with most of it coming in late summer or midwinter.

### Location & Early History

Imperial County is located near the Mexican and Arizona borders in Southern California. In the early 1900's the region was a barren desert. Early developers saw that Colorado River could be diverted to supply irrigation water. By 1915, three hundred thousand acres were under cultivation producing vegetables, agronomic crops and livestock to feed the nation.

In 2009, Imperial Valley had 572,286 harvested acres worth \$1,045,092,000. Leading crops in the area in 2007 are vegetables (114,099 acres -value \$690.3 million, agronomic crops (368,517 acres -value \$257 million), livestock (Value \$343.2 million) fruit & nuts (5,745 acres -value \$47.765 million), seed & nursery (62,237 -value \$65.577 million, and apiary products (\$3.562 million).

## **The Vegetables**

Imperial Valley has a well-known reputation for midwinter salad vegetables. Shipments of crisp head lettuce, leaf lettuce, cauliflower, broccoli, and cabbage start in December and continue until March. Asparagus is in-season January, February and March. Carrots are harvested January to June.

Spring production of warm-season vegetables starts in late April with the harvest of Sweet Imperial onions, sweet corn, bell pepper, chili peppers, cantaloupes, mixed melons and watermelons.

## **The Field Crops**

Alfalfa is the number one agronomic crop with over 112,912 acres in production in 2009. The majority of the alfalfa is baled for shipment to California dairies. This is the largest alfalfa growing region in the world. Some alfalfa is exported.

Sugar beets are a major crop, with yields on 18,022 acres in production averaging 45 tons/acre in 2009. Most of the wheat is durham types for pasta production. Sudan grass for hay is the third leading field crop with 34,404 acres in production, also in 2009. Most of the Sudan grass is used for export to the Pacific Rim countries. Wheat is the fourth leading agronomic crop with 111,638 acres produced.

**Field Crops** – 2009 total acres 353,128; value \$312,554,000.

## **The Livestock**

In 2009 there were 373,866 head of cattle in feedlots. The cattle had a gross value of \$343.2 million. Imperial County has the largest number of feedlot and fed-cattle capacity in California.

Over 245,000 head of feeder lambs were pastured on Imperial Valley alfalfa fields. During the 5 month winter feeding period Imperial County has the largest concentration of feeder lambs in the nation. The lambs were worth \$7.5 million.

## **The Farmland**

Farmland consists of very fertile, alluvial deposits derived from the Colorado River flood plain. Well-drain loams and silty loams are the preferred soil types. Since the area was developed in near the turn of the century by water & land companies, the fields were marked off in sections (1 mile x 1 mile). Parcels were subdivided into smaller and smaller units with 40 acres normally being the smallest farmable size. The average price of farmland is \$2,000-\$5,000 per acre depending upon land quality. Factors governing price of land include soil type, drainage, location, cement ditches, access to paved roads, underground drain systems.

## **The Irrigation Water**

The Colorado River is the source of the irrigation water that brings life to this desert region. The 80-mile long All-American Canal delivers water to the southeast corner of the Imperial Valley. Roughly 2.8 million acre-feet of water are used per year to grow the crops and livestock to help feed the nation. Irrigation water is delivered via 16,000 miles of canals managed by the local water company, the Imperial Irrigation District. Most of the water is delivered by gravity as the valley is tilted slightly to the north. Current water price is \$20.00 per acre-foot (326,000 gallons) delivered to the farmer's head gate.

## **The People**

Imperial County had approximately 174,528 inhabitants in 2010. Principle cities and population are El Centro (42,598), Calexico (38,572), Brawley (24,953), Imperial (14,758), Calipatria (7,705), Holtville (5,939), and Westmorland (2,225).

Source: US 2010 Census