

MERCED COUNTY AGRICULTURE

UC Cooperative Extension

With a raw product value of almost 3 billion dollars, agriculture is Merced County's number one industry and is the county's largest employer. Production agriculture employs a fifth of the county's residents. When you include food processing, Ag employs about a third of the workforce.

Dollar-wise, Merced is the fifth most important ag county in the state and 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. We are one of the top five producers of Milk/cream, cheese, sweet potatoes, figs, cantaloupes, fresh market tomatoes, honey, almonds, cotton, sugar beets, eggs/chickens, turkeys, cattle/calves, pasture, silage, corn, honey and hay.

Due to our well-trained farmers and allied professionals, with the help of an ideal climate, Merced County ag products are known for high quality. 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 is situated near the geographical center of the state on a gently sloping alluvial plain in the center of the great San Joaquin Valley, 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 cattle 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, almost all of which falls in the winter. Another unique aspect of the Central Valley weather is the infamous Tule fog. While being a hindrance to driving, the fog provides many of the dormant "chill hours" below 45°F, which are needed for most fruit and nut trees to bloom normally and set a crop.

Because of our high quality, ample production and proximity of major shipping points, Merced County products are exported to over **70** countries on every continent. Internationally known food processors have located in the county in order to better take advantage of our agricultural productivity and diversity. Notable examples are the largest winery in the world-E & J Gallo, Foster Farms, the largest single poultry processing plant in the world and Hilmar Cheese, the largest cheese plant. Other examples include:

Ingomar Packing Co; Morningstar Foods Inc/Liberty Packing Co-----	processed tomato products
Hilmar Cheese Co., Joseph Farms, Peluso Cheese Inc-----	cheese processing
California Dairies Inc.-----	cheese, powdered milk, condensed milk, cream
Oasis Foods -----	canned specialty fruit
Hillview Packing-----	dried fruit
Teasdale Quality Foods-----	beans, hominy
Dole Packaged Frozen Foods-----	frozen, canned and vacuum-packed foods
Ballico Bio Farming; Central Valley Processing, -----	almond processing
Del Rio Nut Company; Gold Hills Nut Co -----	almond processing
Hilltop Ranch; Minturn Nut Co; RPAC -----	almond processing
Buchanan Hollow Nut Co.-----	pistachio processing
Anderson Nut Co; Pustateri Nut Co; Sanfilippo & Sons-----	walnut processing

Sensient Dehydrated Flavors Co-----dehydrated seasonings
 Richwood Meat Co; Wolfsen’s Meat & Sausage; ----- meat processing
 C.J. Mac’s Beef Jerky; Jim’s Farm Meat; Los Banos Abattoir ----- meat processing
 Pork Palace; Willie’s Meat Processing; Sanders Meat ----- meat processing
 Safeway; Kagome-----specialty processed foods
 AND MORE

There are many packers who ship fresh commodities and other products all over the continent.

California Tomato Growers----- tomatoes
 Live Oak Farms----- tomatoes, peppers
 J Marchini----- radicchio
 V.H. Azhdinian & Company----- melons
 Several packers send sweet potatoes (& yams) all over North America.

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 a 2.5 billion dollar gross farm gate value generates more than 7.5 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:

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<p>Merced County Farm Bureau 646 South Hwy 59 PO BOX 1232 Merced, CA 95341 Phone: (209) 723-3001 www.mercedfarmbureau.org/</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Merced County – California’s Heartland</p>

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