



LIVESTOCK AND NATURAL RESOURCES



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AGRICULTURE IN PLACER COUNTY

Placer County agriculture developed in response to meeting the food demands of the mining industry.

Food was grown and harvested at the lower elevations and then transported to higher elevations where the miners worked. From the late 1800s through the early 1900s, Placer County was known across the United States for its fruit production.

Convenient rail access allowed shipments of fruit to arrive in good shape to eastern markets. As irrigation water and other shipping points developed across the state, demand for Placer County fruit began to decline.

Despite the decline, fruit was still the number one commodity produced in Placer County in 1951. The top 5 crops that year were plums, cattle, pears, sheep, and turkeys.

By 1971, fruit had declined to the number three among commodities and rice appeared at number four.

Today, fruit is no longer a top five commodity (see table at top of page 2). Turkeys have also dropped out as well. Nursery products and walnuts

have replaced them.

Plums declined as other markets developed. Pears dropped out due to disease problems in the 1960s.

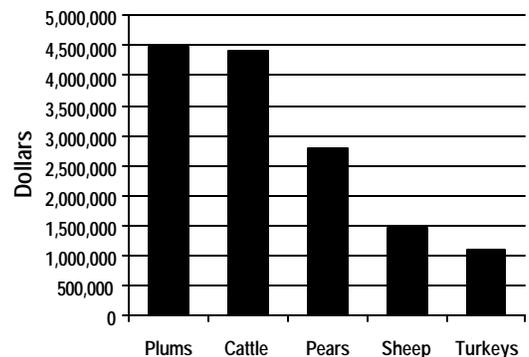
Rice began to come on the scene in the 1950s and has steadily increased since then.

Turkeys completely dropped out after 1993 when grower contracts were cancelled.

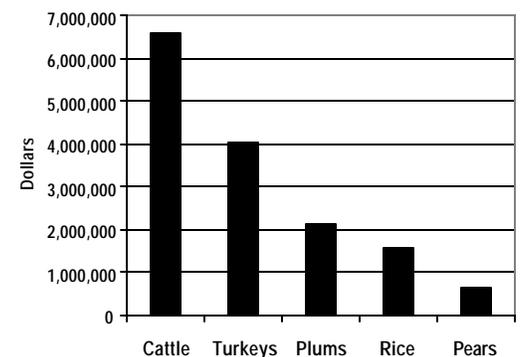
Nursery products have increased as population has increased over the past 20 years.

Over the past decade, Placer County has been among the five fastest growing counties in California.

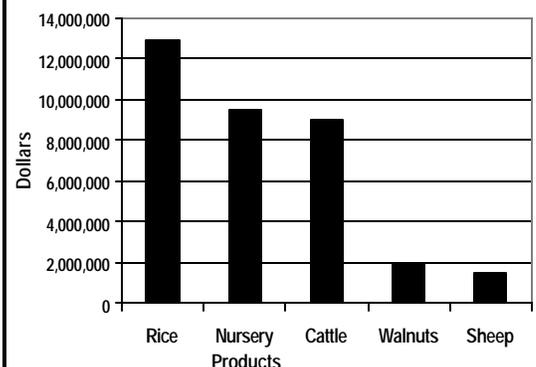
Placer County Top 5 Crops, 1951



Placer County Top 5 Crops, 1971



Placer County Top 5 Crops, 1996



Placer County population increased at an annual rate of 4.6% between the years of 1980 and 1996.

The California Department of Finance projects a population of 358,500 by 2020.

Rapid growth has taken its toll on agriculture. Farmland has declined 33% since 1978. Concurrent with the decline in total agricultural acreage has been the drop in average farm size.

Between the years of 1978 to 1992, this average declined from 224 to 122 acres. Despite the drop in farm size, farm numbers increased by 38% between 1974 and 1992.

The trend for Placer County agriculture is small farms, as over 71% are 49 acres or less in size.

Decreased farm size has led to a decline in agricultural income threatening long-term sustainability of agriculture. Over 80% of Placer County farms derive less than \$10,000 in gross income annually.

Average farm owner income was \$13,250 in 1990. Average farm labor income for the same year was \$12,000. To survive economically, over 40% of farm owners must spend more than 200 days working off the farm. According to the 1996 Placer County Crop Report, agriculture generates over \$47 million in gross income.

Growing concern about agriculture resulted in the development of the 1987 Placer County Agricultural Study. In 1989, an agricultural element was added to the General Plan and was updated in 1994. In addition, a Right to

Farm ordinance was adopted in 1989.

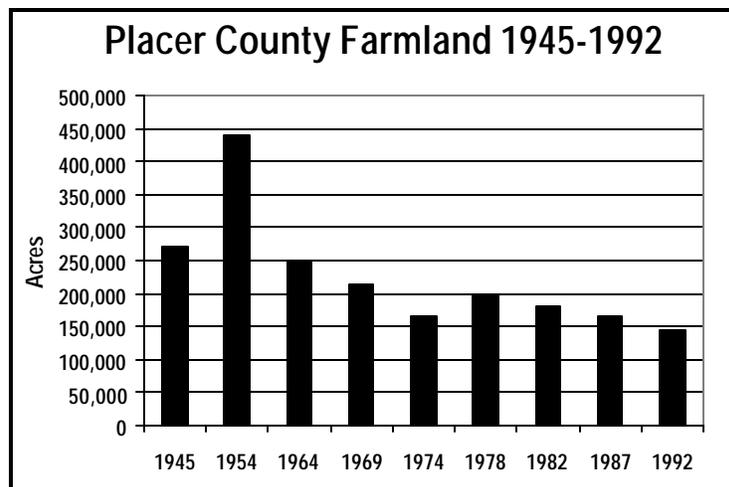
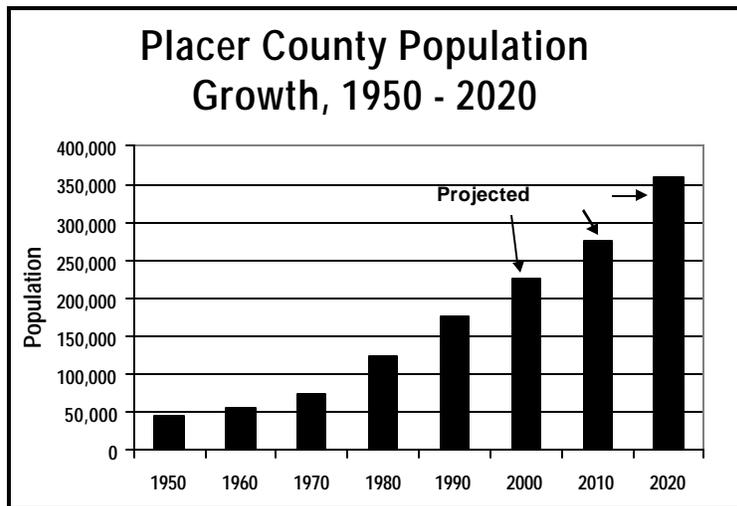
These actions show a strong commitment to keeping agriculture viable in Placer County. People moving into the area are concerned as well. A Sierra Business Council survey found that 77% of the county's residents identified quality of life as a major factor for choosing to live in Placer County.

While agriculture does have support, it still faces enormous challenges due to rapid

growth. As growth inflates land values, it makes it more difficult to get started in farming. The average age of a farmer in Placer County is over 55. As this population begins to reach retirement, selling the land they own is how they will fund their retirement.

There are no easy answers out there. No matter how much preservation and slow growth rhetoric exists — MONEY TALKS.

In order to be an effective voice in the face of these challenges, the ag community



must stand together.

It does not matter if you raise livestock or tomatoes or rice or mandarins. It does not matter whether you farm 1,000 acres or five.

The issues facing local agriculture today cut across all commodities and affect large and small growers alike.

What can you do? Get involved. Learn more about issues affecting agriculture and find commodity groups, farm organizations, county committees, and voice your opinions.

The Placer County Agricultural Commission and Placer Legacy (*contact information and members are listed to the right*) are two places to start. There are no easy answers — but getting involved is an important first step.

PLACER COUNTY AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION

Ag Commissioner:

Griffith Yamamoto

Meetings:

2nd Monday of each month,
7:00 p.m.

Meeting Location:

11477 E Avenue, DeWitt Center,
Auburn

Additional:

Public welcome to attend, call
(530) 889-7372 to confirm
meeting information

Commission Members:

Patricia Beard (*foothill farms*)
Paul Ferrari (*livestock*)
Richard Johnson (*timber*)
William Morebeck (*small farms*)
Howard Nakae (*fruits/nuts*)
William E. Richmond (*field crops*)
Wayne Vineyard (*rice*)
John H. Wilson (*agricultural processing*)

PLACER LEGACY

Staff Contact:

Loren Clark, *Senior Planner*

Meetings:

Call for information to
(530) 889-7470.

Meeting Location:

Varies, call for information.

Additional:

Public welcome to attend, call
(530) 889-7470 to confirm
meeting dates/times/location.

Members:

Joanne Neft (*chair*)
Ron Bakken
Jeff Bordelon
Sharon Cavallo
Alex Ferreira
Ron Heskett
Thomas Lumbrazo
Don Riolo
Bob Roan
Larry Welch

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United States Department of Agriculture, University of California, Placer and Nevada Counties cooperating.