

ORANGE COUNTY  
(Reference  
Pamphlet File)

**100 YEARS OF AGRICULTURE  
IN ORANGE COUNTY**

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**County of Orange**  
AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONER DEPARTMENT

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ORANGE COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
COUNTY OFFICE  
200 WEST GARDEN AVENUE  
ORANGE, CALIFORNIA 92667

APRIL 1989

TAXATION AND DEBT

Indebtedness and Tax Rate for Orange County — 1887

|  |               |
|--|---------------|
| Value of Mortgages and Other Obligations   |               |
| Assessed, Including University Mortgages   | \$334,782     |
| Assessed Value of Mortgages Held by University of California, Blind Asylum, Other Institutions | (None shown)  |
| Funded Debt  | (None shown)  |
| Floating Debt with Estimated Interest  | (None shown)  |
| Total County Indebtedness  | (None shown)  |
| Total State and County Rate of Taxation each \$100   | \$1.40—\$1.75 |

The 1898 special edition went on to describe Orange County's agriculture and related history.

"The fertile little section designated as Orange County has fared well this year. With 50,000 acres of barley, 12,000 acres of wheat, 6,000 acres of sugar beets, 800 carloads of oranges, 600 carloads of celery, with at least an average yield of corn, alfalfa, berries and general deciduous fruits; lemons and olives; hogs, sheep and cattle; a largely increased product of butter and eggs; plenty of honey, peanuts, walnuts and beans; onions and potatoes; wood, oil and coal, there need be no cause for surprise in asserting that conditions generally are good, money easy and a variety of important improvements have been and are being made. The new beet-sugar factory at Los Alamitos has just closed its initial season. The factory was erected at a cost of \$400,000 by William Clarke, the silver king of Montana. It has a capacity of 500 tons of beets per day and has maintained an average of over 300 its first season. Important additions will soon be made to handle a larger product next year.

Olive culture has made a marked advance this year, and on the ranch of David Hewes, near El Modena, a large force has been kept busy for several weeks picking and barreling as fine a lot of this staple fruit as can be found anywhere. Many hundreds of acres in the foothill regions have been planted to this product and in a few years the olive will become an important factor in the county's resources.

Being blessed with abundant and widely diversified crops in cereals, fruits and livestock, the people of Orange County have felt to an appreciable degree the return of better times and prices. This is particularly true of grain farmers, who have reaped a rich harvest."

The earliest fruit tree census we have for Orange County appeared in the March 1901 report of the State Board of Horticulture as provided by county assessors. Plantings were shown as number of trees and acres are estimated at today's planting distances.

NUMBER OF TREES

| <u>CROP</u>     | <u>BEARING</u> | <u>NON-BEARING</u> | <u>TOTAL</u> | <u>ACRES</u> |
|-----------------|----------------|--------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Apple           | 8,514          | 6,220              | 14,734       | 190          |
| Apricot         | 80,045         | 53,251             | 133,296      | 1,750        |
| Peach           | 16,843         | 27,141             | 43,984       | 580          |
| Pear            | 3,285          | 1,845              | 5,130        | 65           |
| Prune           | 24,050         | 12,385             | 36,435       | 480          |
| Fig             | 2,700          | —                  | 2,700        | 50           |
| Olive           | 32,875         | 11,060             | 43,935       | 1,100        |
| Orange          | 240,328        | 118,720            | 359,048      | 4,725        |
| Lemon           | 24,780         | 52,548             | 77,328       | 1,020        |
| Walnut          | 94,610         | 73,650             | 168,260      | 6,200        |
| Grapes (Raisin) |                |                    |              | 850          |

The first record that we have of Orange County's agricultural income is shown for the year 1911 when the total production grossed \$12,150,000. Oranges were the major crop and 4,500 carloads grossed \$2,550,000. Two other very large crops of that day were apricots and walnuts.

In June of 1912, the State Department of Agriculture in its Monthly Bulletin, expressed some concern that "as of that date the crop reports from Alameda, Santa Clara, and Orange Counties had not been received. Without reports from these counties which are among the heaviest apricot-producing counties in the State, it is impossible to make a general estimate."

In the same year, the Orange County Agricultural Commissioner reported to the State Department of Agriculture that "extensive development has taken place in Orange County the past few years. Large acres of lemons, oranges, walnuts, and apricots have been planted."

By 1915, 20,850 acres of citrus had been planted. Our agricultural inventory included 17,500 acres of deciduous tree crops which showed in order of importance, walnuts, apricots, peaches, olives, and apples. Other crops listed were 3,000 acres of alfalfa, 40,000 acres of lima and blackeye beans, 35,000 acres of sugar beets, and 1,000 acres of potatoes.

By 1923, the total citrus in the county had increased from 20,850 acres to 55,500 acres. Walnuts reached their peak of 18,000 acres. Apples increased but apricots which had been a major crop decreased from 1,760 acres to 400. The sugar beet acreage was literally cut in half from 35,000 acres recorded in 1915 to 18,700 acres. Peppers were listed for the first time with 6,300 acres planted. The grand total income for 1923 was listed at \$29,667,000.

In 1925, Rider's "California" (A Guide Book for Travelers) had this to say:

"Orange County is one of the largest producers of citrus fruits, a great acreage of which has been planted in recent years. There is also considerable land planted in olives. The county is one of the most intensively farmed districts in California, and has approximately 92 percent of all its land under irrigation. Of all the counties, it now ranks sixth in value of crops, and produces nearly one-third of the world's crop of walnuts. Santa Ana is the largest walnut shipping point in the world. La Habra and Los Nietos Valleys contain some of the highest priced orange and lemon lands in the State, while nearly all of California's green and red chili peppers and pimientos are grown in Orange County."

The year 1930 almost saw the end of the apricot industry. One hundred and five acres of apricots produced 205 lugs of fresh fruit and 7-1/2 tons of dried fruit worth the grand sum of \$950. This is an industry that in 1911 had produced 2,800,000 pounds (1,400 tons) from 1,760 acres.

From 1930 to the early 40's, there was a gradual change in the agricultural picture in Orange County. Plantings of Valencia oranges reached their peak with a total of 65,653 acres. The total citrus planted in 1942 amounted to 75,608 acres. This was a citrus planting equal to almost that of the combined citrus acreages of Riverside County and Tulare County for 1960. The grand total of all orchard crops in 1942 amounted to 83,100 acres.

A 1938 land study showed that 290 square miles of land in Orange County was either developed or under cultivation. Of this total, 86% of the land was in agricultural use, 5.9% in oil fields, 5.6% in residential use, 1.6% in commercial use, 0.5% in parks and miscellaneous use and less than 0.5% in industrial use.

In 1940, the economy of Orange County was primarily oriented around agriculture and its allied industries. The agricultural industry alone provided 1/5 of the jobs in the county, while manufacturing provided only about 10% of the jobs in the county at that time.

Throughout the 40's, Orange County's agriculture remained fairly stable. Tree crop acreages remained fairly constant. The acreage that was removed was replaced with other agriculture that produced a higher return per acre. The raising of truck crops became a highly specialized program and the acreage and returns showed a steady increase. Nursery production gave indication of being a phase of the industry that should be watched as its production and value steadily went up. Both milk production and egg production increased steadily through the 40's.

In 1949, twelve commodities were listed as "Million Dollar Enterprises." The gross production for that year was \$77,507,000.

Apricots were a major crop in 1911 with 1,760 acres. By 1950, its acreage had dwindled to eight, and it was removed as a commercial crop. Walnut acreage had been reduced from its peak of almost 18,000 acres to 1,500. In 1967 walnuts were removed as a commercial crop.

The 50's could easily be called the golden years in Orange County's agricultural production history. Starting with 1951, there were only two years during this period when the farmer's contribution to Orange County's economy fell below \$100 million. These were the years of many million dollar enterprises. The 50's ended with 1959 being the highest production year in the history of Orange County with a grand gross of \$114,065,700. This record stood until 1973 when gross returns were \$131,104,900.

There were many changes throughout the 50's. Citrus acreage had been reduced from 75,608 to 37,100 acres, and total orchard acreage reduced from 83,100 acres to 38,250. Truck crop acreage had increased from 16,500 to 24,100 acres and production had increased from \$8,079,000 in 1950 to \$21,585,000 in 1959. Nursery stock values had increased from \$400,000 in the 40's, to \$4,065,000 in 1959. Strawberry acreage and production had increased from 340 acres and \$1,098,000 in 1950 to 840 acres worth \$4,950,000.

The 60's were transitional years for Orange County's agricultural industry. As the nursery and strawberry industries developed, 40,000 acres of other crops were removed from production. Dry beans dropped from over 20,000 acres in 1960 to 427 in 1969. Valencia oranges were starting to decline in the 50's and continued to go out of production. 13,000 acres were used for other purposes. Gross values for production followed this same trend. A 1960 value of \$111,060,800 declined to \$83,702,000 in 1969.

While decreasing acres and value were common in the 60's, the 70's marked a resurgence for the agricultural industry. Better production techniques and higher valued crops resulted in 21 different crops making the million dollar list in 1979. The nursery industry which grew slowly in the 50's and 60's was now the established leader on this list, from a little over 4 million dollars in 1959 to \$106 million in 1979. The houses, parks, and commercial buildings which were springing up throughout Southern California required landscaping and Orange County's nurserymen provided much of these plant products.

Local growers also looked to expand their markets. Orange County's fruits, vegetables, and plant products started to compete for a place on the national and international market. Oranges, strawberries, asparagus, and nursery stock were being shipped worldwide. Some of Orange County's crop main-

stays started to decline. The dairy industry which had been one of the County's leaders since the 20's failed to be listed in the 1979 crop report.

The 1980's have shown continued development of the nursery industry. Both outdoor ornamentals and indoor potted plant production contribute to our current leading industry. Nursery has surpassed 100 million dollars in production each of the past eight years. Other crops have increased in both value and acreage. Strawberries, asparagus, green beans, cabbage, and lettuce, all increased acres.

Technology played an important part in agricultural development during the 80's. New irrigation, fertilizer, and pest control techniques all have helped local growers increase both quality and volume. New and better varieties of all types of fruits and vegetables have enabled local growers to continue to produce and compete in the marketplace. Peppers which produced 8.9 tons per acre in 1977 exceeded 18 tons per acre in 1987.

Although weather conditions, market demands, and local and international quarantines all affect crop price and availability, Orange County has remained a prominent contributor to the nation's agricultural economy. For each of the past nine years, total production has exceeded 200 million dollars, and Orange County continues to rank in the top 1% in nurseries, vegetables, and fruit production for all counties in the United States.