

Summary: California Farming

A Good Place to Farm

California is a good place to farm, with soil in some areas that is deep, rich, and free of rocks. The warm climate is also good for farming. In the 1860s, farmers began to grow wheat and raise cattle on large farms in the Central Valley. Wheat needs little water and could grow in the dry parts of the valley. Wheat farms grew so large that farmers needed better technology to harvest the land. New gang plows were pulled by 100 mules. A combined harvester could cut, thresh, and bag wheat in one sweep. In other parts of the state, people grew new crops such as navel oranges. Soon other farmers followed their lead. In 1875, Luther Burbank, a plant scientist, moved to California and developed new types of fruits, vegetables, and flowers.

Working the Land

Parts of the Central Valley didn't get enough rain to farm. Other lands near rivers and streams were too wet. Farmers used irrigation to bring water to dry areas. Ditches, pipes, and canals carried the water. Canals were also used to drain water from wetlands. But this changed the environment. In the 1870s, only a few farmers and businesses owned most of the farmland and water in California. Newcomers who couldn't buy land worked as tenant farmers. They received a small part of the harvest in return for growing crops on someone else's land. Landowners also hired migrant workers.

Railroads and the Market

By 1900, California was growing huge amounts of fruits and vegetables. Demand for fresh produce in other parts of the country was met by building railroads to carry produce to distant markets. Railroads fought with landowners over land, and sometimes farmers were killed while being forced off the land. The new railroads were slow and expensive. Produce often rotted before reaching the East Coast. In 1870, the first refrigerated railroad cars used ice to keep as much as 70 tons of apples, grapes, pears, and plums cold and fresh. As technology improved, farmers could ship more produce across the country at lower costs.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

irrigation *noun*, the use of ditches, pipes, or canals to bring water to dry land

migrant worker *noun*, a person who moves from place to place to find work, mostly on farms

demand *noun*, amount of a good or service that people want to buy at different prices

market *noun*, a place where goods and services are exchanged



After You Read

REVIEW Why did wheat farms need new technology? Highlight the sentences that tell why farmers needed better technology to harvest wheat.

REVIEW Why did people become tenant farmers in the late 1800s? Underline the sentences that explain why newcomers worked for the owners of large farms.

REVIEW Why did farming grow after the invention of the refrigerated railroad car? Draw a box around the two sentences that explain how refrigeration helped the farming industry grow.