California Crops in 1952

production capacity attainable this year appraised on basis of trends and changes in past cropping patterns

Trimble R. Hedges and Warren R. Bailey

Cereal crops, sugar beets, alfalfa, and irrigated pasture are expected to gain acreage in California in 1952.

Crops likely to decrease in acreage during this year are cotton, rice, tomatoes, dry edible beans, and flaxseed.

In estimating the 1952 attainable acreage, changes in the state total cropping pattern between 1950 and 1951 were considered. Cotton, rice, tomatoes, beans and flaxseed increased some 928,500 acres from 1950 to 1951, when they occupied nearly 2¼ million acres, a total that is deemed excessive considering available land and water. Cotton was responsible for 81% of this acreage shift. There also were important acreage increases for rice and canning tomatoes. The latter almost doubled between the two years.

Among the reasons for this acreage increase during 1951 were higher prices offered for cotton and canning tomatoes, and the removal of acreage limitations for cotton and rice. The acreage increase for tomatoes resulted partly from grower reaction to unfavorable harvesting conditions for sugar beets in 1950.

The 1951 increases of cotton were gained partly at the expense of land that may have been fallowed, idle or pastured, partly by displacing other crops. The cereal group declined 418,000 acres in 1951, sugar beets and potatoes 108,000 acres, and alfalfa 127,000 acres. Not all of this total of 653,000 acreage was shifted into the cash crops showing marked increases. Cereals were considerably reduced by weather conditions.

It is estimated that in 1952 approximately 154,000 acres of land probably will be taken out of the major California crops that showed sharp acreage increases in 1951.

Cotton will absorb most of this reduction—some 91,000 acres—as an adjustment to some degree of overexpansion in 1951. Rice, canning tomatoes, and dry edible beans will decline about 20,000 acres each. Flaxseed production in 1952 is expected to drop some 2,000 acres.

It is further estimated that the cereal group will restore some of the acreage lost in 1951. Plantings are expected to increase 188,000 acres—sharply less than the 262,000 estimated for acres harvested. This expectation reflects the relatively heavy abandonment due to unfavorable weather in spring 1951.

Sugar beets are expected to increase 16,000 acres, or about 11%. Sugar beet acreage was reduced below optimum levels during 1951, while the canning tomato acreage expanded to the point that critical labor shortages might have handicapped harvest, thus lowering gross and net returns. It would seem logical for 1952 to correct this situation by shifting some tomato acreage into sugar beets and other crops.

Alfalfa in 1952 is likely to regain part of the acreage lost the preceding year. Alfalfa prices in California are relatively independent of those in the rest of the country and, as projected for 1952, favor some acreage increase.

It is anticipated that the acreage of irrigated pasture will again increase in 1952 by approximately the same 5% rate at which it has continued to increase during recent years.

No important changes in truck crop acreage—except canning tomatoes—are estimated for 1952. The situation is similar for tree fruits, nuts, and vines.

Yields per acre are estimated to be somewhat higher in 1952 than in 1950, though most changes will not be sharp, percentage-wise. One exception is cotton. The estimated yield for cotton in 1952 is 700 pounds of lint per acre compared with 803 pounds in 1950 and 564 pounds average for the base period.

The three major areas showing sharp changes in the cropping pattern between 1950 and 1951, may bring new changes in 1952.

The San Joaquin Valley experienced the greatest total shift in acreage between 1950 and 1951. Cotton acreage increased about 700,000 acres; barley, alfalfa, potatoes, sugar beets, and grain sorghums showed decreases totaling 500,000 acres; and some 200,000 acres were picked up from idle newly developed land, rotation, fallow, pasture and minor uses. A considerable acreage of land was leveled and provided with irrigation facilities—chiefly wells—during the 1949 and 1950 seasons. Cotton has been assigned a major portion of this new acreage.

In the Sacramento Valley sugar beets decreased about 19,000 acres between 1950 and 1951, while barley and wheat declined 89,000 acres. Rice increased 75,000, dry beans 19,000, and tomatoes almost 19,000 acres. Important readjustments are anticipated in the 1952 crop pattern.

In the Imperial County cotton production rose from less than 1,000 acres in 1950 to about 38,000 acres in 1951. In the remainder of the area south of the Tehachapi mountain range the increase was from 3,000 to 26,000 acres. Cereals—chiefly grain sorghum—was reduced about 10,000 acres in the Imperial County and some 60,000 acres in the remainder of the southern area.

There is evidence that alfalfa and sugar beet acreages are being reduced in this area, and that more reduction may occur.

Double cropping of cotton after winter crops of vegetables has been typical of Imperial County and the other adapted areas. Under the projected level of prices, cotton is likely to continue to be the important field crop south of the Tehachapi.

Trimble R. Hedges is Associate Professor of Agricultural Economics, University of California College of Agriculture, Davis.

Warren R. Bailey is Agricultural Economist, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U.S.D.A., Berkeley.

The study is based on a co-operative investigation conducted by the California State Committee on Survey of Agricultural Productive Capacity. The committee includes representatives of the University of California, the United States Department of Agriculture, and State agencies.

CALIFORNIA AGRICULTURE

Progress Reports of Agricultural Research, published monthly by the University of California College of Agriculture, Agricultural Experiment Station.

William F. Calkins.....*Manager* Agricultural Publications

W. G. Wilde.....*Editor and Manager* California Agriculture

CALIFORNIA AGRICULTURE will be sent free upon request addressed to: Agricultural Publications, University of California College of Agriculture, 22 Giannini Hall, Berkeley 4, California. Please allow about two weeks between your request and the arrival of your first copy.

In order that the information in *CALIFORNIA AGRICULTURE* may be simplified, it is sometimes necessary to use trade names of products or equipment. No endorsement of named products is intended nor is criticism implied of similar products which are not mentioned.