

THE IMPERIAL VALLEY

As Seen and Studied By Dr. E. A. Lee, Who Sees For It a Bright and Great Future

Having been so often importuned for information regarding the great Imperial Valley of California, I have thought best to supply some such desired information by addressing the following to your paper and by this means reach a much greater number than is possible by private correspondence.

The hitherto vexed water question being now settled for all time by again returning the Colorado river to its former channel carrying the water to the Gulf of California has added renewed interest to this very interesting subject. The location of the Valley may be described by saying it is situated just outside the Coast Range of mountains in San Diego county, Calif., and distant from the city of San Diego about one hundred and twenty-five miles due east.

It lies west of the Colorado river, from which it derives an unlimited and constant supply of irrigating water [at all seasons of the year. In area the Valley is more than 40 miles long by 30 miles wide and contains about fifteen hundred square miles of irrigable land which is in the main quite level, but having an inclination to the north and west of from four to ten feet fall to the mile.

The whole Valley has been formed by the filling in of the deposit of the Colorado river and thus leveling up] in a measure this large inter-mountain basin. This deposit has consisted mainly of a fine silt and very fine sand and reaching to a known depth of several hundred feet. The entire Valley is susceptible of irrigation or in other words can be covered by water and irrigated, yet requiring more or less leveling for this purpose.

The elevation ranges from two hundred and eighty-seven feet below sea level to about forty feet above. On being told that the general level is below the sea, one would very naturally inquire if there was not danger of its being inundated to which it may be replied that there is an intervening coast range of mountains nearly five thousand feet in height through which the Colorado has cut its way to the Gulf of California and is now flowing with a moderate grade from the Valley to the sea.

As stated the soil consists of silt and sand combined in somewhat variable proportions and the lands are designated as silt and soft lands depending on the proportion of sand, the former being composed almost exclusively of fine silt with almost entire absence of sand and partaking quite a little of the qualities of adobe yet never getting so hard and unyielding when dry nor so gummy or sticky when wet. It does not irrigate so easily nor does it hold moisture so well as the softer lands. The soft land is composed of silt and sand combined.

The presence of the sand in all cases makes it more soft and foible, while that containing most sand is frequently so soft that when driven over by a vehicle the wheels often sink into the uncultivated soil several inches. The soft land is usually much preferred for the reason it is so much more easily worked seldom gets very muddy when wet, is a warmer soil and is considered far better for fruits, gardens, cantaloupes and alfalfa. As before stated the whole Valley has been formed by the sediment deposited by the Colorado river and at all times there is sufficient silt in the water to make it very dark and muddy, not unlike that seen in the ditches and gutters after a summer shower. This sediment is said to represent from two to five per cent. of the water and when used for irrigation purposes it greatly enriches the land.

This filling in of the Valley has been a slow and long continued process of land building, which we have been permitted to see duplicated in a measure during the last two years during which the water has been flowing directly from the river into the Salton sea through an unprotected cut thoughtlessly made in the river bank for diverting the waters for irrigating purposes.

This sea gradually filled in with water and silt until it now has a dimension of about two hundred and seventy-five square miles in extent with a depth of seventy-five feet gradually lessening as the shore line is approached. Now that the Colorado river has been diverted evaporation will proceed quite rapidly and unless replenished by the waste waters from irrigating ditches will in a few years be dry as before when an opportunity will be given to see the amount of sediment deposited on the land made on the inflowing side of the sea where large deposits of silt have taken place. This sediment in former times consisted in no small degree of the products of

prehistoric volcanoes along the river's course from the upper tributaries of the Grand river in Colorado all the way down through Colorado, Utah, Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona and California, bringing with it untold quantities of the earthy salts and minerals, such as sulphur, iron potash, lime and phosphoric acid, storing them in the soil to be drawn upon for future use following this period of deposition and during the latter period of it there was a time when this great basin was covered with water as is positively shown by the presence of vast quantities of shells deposited on the surface and in the soil. Taking up a handful of soil one can see in most places dozens of these small shells and in many places hundreds of them. The importance of this vast and almost uniform deposit of lime in the soil has only to be mentioned to be highly appreciated by any intelligent agriculturalist and readily accounts for the marvelous fertility of the region.

We have here practically produced for us on a very large scale what may be observed in many places in regions where cultivated lands lie below lime deposits in the hills above them and where the fertility is in most striking contrast to the surrounding soils containing less lime and other ingredients obtained from the rocks which are being slowly broken down and thus becoming a component part of the soil.

Among the industries of the Valley dairying is making rapid strides for a newly settled region. A creamery company formed at this place some time ago had the promise of the produce of more than thirteen hundred cows and other portions of the Valley show a corresponding activity in this line. It is estimated that an ordinary dairy cow will produce in cream about six to seven dollars per month and that the by products will increase these figures to about ten dollars per month, and when it is estimated that the business can be conducted at less than half the expense usually incurred for feeding and keeping dairy cows it can readily be seen what must be the large profits made by those now in the business.

Horses and mules can be produced here in great perfection and at small cost, as every day in the year they are supplied with an excellent quality of green feed, thus ensuring a most rapid growth when young, nor is the growth ever checked by a period of cold weather when animals so situated usually make small increase by winter growth.

The greatest financial success yet reached here has been in raising hogs, which as in the case of cattle, horses and mules is done at greatly reduced expense, as the hog is raised and matured on a feed of alfalfa and barley neither one of which is ever cut as the hog does his own harvesting and by this method he can be produced at a price not exceeding one fourth to one third the cost in other parts of the country where hogs are produced and considered quite profitable.

Many farmers could be named here who now have from five hundred to one thousand hogs, a few several times that number and they are cared for and looked after by two or three men reducing the cost of production to not exceeding one and a half to two cents a pound and the selling price here is six to seven cents.

In Arizona where climatic conditions are quite similar, hogs have been grown for thirty years with a singular freedom, as here, from any serious disease. At this time the hog production is said to reach nearly five thousand fattened hogs shipped to Los Angeles monthly, being loaded here in the evening and reaching their destination the next morning. One other consideration which makes hog production popular here is the ease and inexpensiveness with which one may start in in that line and the rapidity with which they can grow into a very large and very profitable business—netting many thousand of dollars yearly. McKim Bros. sold last year over ten thousand dollars worth of hogs produced on their farm.

By reason of the large production of alfalfa and almost constant sunshine this Valley is destined soon to be a very large producer of bees and honey products. In the line of vegetable productions the soil shows great adaption and productiveness. We have here the rather singular feature of two garden planting seasons annually, one about the first of October for winter gardening, including almost all vegetables except beans; the other season for planting comes in February, when any vegetable may be planted and produced with a luxuriousness of growth that is a constant surprise to a tenderfoot. The limits of this paper precludes the full consideration of the production of the Valley, yet experimentation has proceeded far enough to warrant the belief that citrus fruits may be as successfully produced here as

elsewhere in this state, but possibly requiring slight protection during the first winter after planting, yet this has not heretofore been done and many young trees may be seen with a fine showing of fruit. By reason of their special adaptability the desire to mention a few things cannot be resisted; these include grapes, figs and dates, asparagus and cantaloupes. The first and last of these mentioned enables the grower to obtain prices so fabulous the writer is unwilling to hazard his reputation for veracity by giving them. Figs can be produced more cheaply bushel for bushel than corn in the western states. Dates are yet in the experimental stage, yet trees but three years from planting after having been out of the ground for six months and traveled half round the world to reach here are fruiting this season, this being the famous Deglet Noir variety from which the agricultural department at Washington is expecting astonishing results. Cotton has been raised in a small way but sufficient to demonstrate that it can be produced at profit of from fifty to seventy-five dollars per acre.

Mr. Roth, who for many years has been a producer of cantaloupes at Rocky Ford, Colorado, does not hesitate to give the Imperial Valley the preference over Rocky Ford and says the cantaloupes produced here are sweeter and of finer flavor, while here there is a complete immunity from frost, hail and rust and other great advantages, such as having the whole winter for preparation and a much longer season for growth to say nothing of cheaper lands and a reliable supply of water. Although most of the land is new and poorly adapted to the purpose some of the growers secured as high as from \$100.00 to \$200.00 per acre net for their crop. Last year witnessed the first efforts in the Valley at growing cantaloupes mostly of prime quality. Three hundred cars were produced. There are many other things which may be produced here to as great advantage as those mentioned, yet space will not permit their further consideration. Lands can be secured here by purchase from those holding patents and also from those who have submitted their proof of compliance with all the requirements of the law and there are some opportunities to secure assignments and also relinquishment of claims for small consideration, pending a more complete survey of the lands; most of them have been temporarily withdrawn from market, hence no filings are being made. The prices of land ranges from \$30.00 to \$100.00 per acre depending more on location than quality for almost all the land is good and there is a wonderful uniformity of quality. There is now one hundred thousand acres under cultivation in this Valley and about two hundred thousand which may be added.

With just moderately intensified cultivation the Imperial Valley can support several hundred thousand population and with these conditions realized what will be the value of the land? A hundred dollars per acre? Yes. Two hundred? Yes, three hundred in many places: yes and much more as is now the case in Los Angeles and the adjacent counties.

The land being formed by water is of necessity mainly a water grade with few inequalities of surface, thus making it an ideal region for irrigation, which is proven by the fact when well bordered one may be able to irrigate from forty to eighty acres a day.

"I consider the owners of land in the Imperial Valley among the luckiest farmers in the United States," says Hon. F. W. Mondell, of Wyoming, chairman of the House Committee on Irrigation and Reclamation of Arid Lands, after a day spent in viewing the wonderful results of irrigation in that field.

"I do not know of any section of land in the United States so naturally adapted to perfect irrigation as is the Imperial Valley. It is an eye-opener to all who visit it and to those more than ordinarily interested in the subject of irrigation it furnishes a most interesting study. We have discovered through inquiry among the residents of the Valley, who hail from all parts of the United States and even from the very coldest climates we have, that the heat of the climate, which has often been urged against this section, is not oppressive nor does it seem to be enervating. It is a great country all around, and no doubt, has a magnificent future."

Yours very respectfully,
E. A. LEE.

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