

DRIED FIGS FOR TEHAMA COUNTY

Figs are an ancient crop and some history of this crop does exist in Tehama County. As in many other crops new technology, marketing methods and product utilization have revitalized this industry. The rapid spread of the city of Fresno into the fig acreage creates an opportunity to establish this crop in a new area.

Of the four varieties that are commercially marketed the Black Mission appears to fit the Tehama County situation best. Although this variety has not always brought the highest prices per pound, the consistent and heavy yield of high quality fruit indicates that more net profit per acre is likely.

Several characteristics contribute to this return. The tree is large and vigorous, fruit splitting is rare, the tight "eye" greatly reduces insect infestations, a June or first crop is marketable as fresh or dry, and the early harvest of the second crop offers less opportunity for rain during the August harvest season.

Well-maintained groves should yield from two to three dry tons per acre. Harvesting can be by hand or by standard almond sweeping and pickup machines. (The Goodwin is a favorite in Fresno.) The fruit partially dries on the tree, dries a little more before "pickup" from the ground but some "finish drying" and hand sorting should be anticipated. Drying can be sundrying on trays or in prune or walnut dehydrators at about 130° - 140° F. Slow drying is preferred as carmelizing of sugars can occur at high temperatures. It is anticipated that the second crop will be harvested about three times. On the ranch fumigation with methyl bromide is almost mandatory as it stops insect activity and allows safe accumulation of truck-load lots. In the Fresno area some of this work is contracted.

The economic unit or size appears to be 80 to 100 acres. This is enough acreage to support the equipment necessary for an efficient operation. If, for example, the pickup equipment can be utilized in almond or walnut harvest or a neighbor will contract drying and sorting, much smaller acreages may be feasible.

Costs to establish a grove in Tehama County are impossible to substantiate as it has not been done in recent times. The following figures are based on Fresno practices and costs are estimated under local conditions. It should be pointed out that these are optimum conditions and actual costs may be considerably different than these estimates.

COSTS TO ESTABLISH FIGS (30' x 15')

PRACTICE

	Year 1	2	3	4
CULTURAL COSTS				
*Land Preparation (min.)	\$ 10.00			
Trees - 97 @ \$1.25	121.00			
Mark and Plant @ \$.50	48.00	\$ 5.00		
Prune, Train	-----	10.00	\$14.00	\$25.00
Remove Brush	-----	4.00	5.00	7.00
Fertilize: Material and Labor	5.00	8.00	10.00	10.00
Irrigate: Water and Labor	12.00	12.00	12.00	12.00
Disc 4X	12.00	12.00	12.00	12.00
Miscellaneous and Tax	18.00	14.00	12.00	12.00
Repairs	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
Office	11.00	5.00	5.00	6.00
TOTAL CULTURAL COSTS (\$510.00)	\$243.00	\$76.00	\$76.00	\$90.00
Depreciation	\$ 30.00	\$30.00	\$30.00	\$30.00
**Interest on Fixed Assets	55.00	55.00	55.00	55.00
Interest on Accumulated Cost	-----	23.00	38.00	53.00
TOTAL COST PER YEAR	\$328.00	\$184.00	\$199.00	\$228.00
ACCUMULATED COSTS	\$328.00	\$512.00	\$711.00	\$939.00

*Assuming no pre-plant fumigation
 **Interest is charged on land but the cost is not included.
 Interest and depreciation is charged on irrigation system, etc. but the cost is not shown.
 UC Cooperative Extension

ESTIMATED ANNUAL COSTS

15' x 30' - Age 7 - 12 - 2 dry tons marketable

PRACTICE

Prune: 1/3 @ \$1.00 each and remove brush	\$ 40.00
Disc 4X	16.00
Irrigate 2X, 2 acre-feet water	12.00
Miscellaneous	7.00
Total Pre-Harvest Cost	\$ 75.00
Land preparation, harvest, dry, sort, fumigate	\$185.00
Office, tax, etc.	25.00
*Depreciation	50.00
*Interest @ 8%	110.00
Total Cost	\$445.00

Cost per ton \$223 or 11¢ per pound

*Interest and depreciation is shown on the capital investments but the original costs are not shown.

Some production is possible the third year from planting and a few hundred pounds per acre is expected in the fourth year. Income equal to cash expenses should occur in the fourth or fifth year and by the seventh year all accumulated costs should be covered - the breakeven year.

Dried figs are highly regulated and at present only four processors or buyers are active and they all are in the Fresno area. Currently a receiving station is operating in the Woodland - Winters area and it is anticipated that Tehama County figs will be delivered to this station. The regulations prohibit selling "natural condition" figs so that all figs, including culls, must be delivered. The culls are sold for non-human uses and growers usually get a return for this portion of the crop. (The 1973 payment is expected to be about \$75.00 per ton).

The "average" price per ton paid for Black Mission figs, by year, starting in 1966 was \$146, \$164, \$199, \$213, \$216, \$242, \$374, and the estimated 1973 final price is about \$500 per ton.

Black Mission has been increasingly marketed in packages and cartons (18% in 1966 to 54% in 1972), about steady in bulk (38% to 48%), and decreasing in manufactured utilization (48% down to 5-15%).

The outlook for this commodity is good to excellent. The "problem" is a shortage of commodity necessitating a "holding on to customers" action. There are several partially tested products and packs that potentially could expand marketing but without more product these items are not being introduced.

This information is intended to be an introduction to a potential crop for Tehama County and not promoting any particular processor, brand, or land development.

Industrywide and promotional information can be obtained from Ron Klamm, Dried Fig Advisory Board, P. O. Box 709, Fresno, Ca 93712.

During the 1975 season it is anticipated that 80 acres will be planted east of Vina; 60 acres northwest of Corning, and a few acres west of Red Bluff. A nursery of 30,000 cuttings will be established east of Vina and at this time it is the only known source of trees for 1975 planting.

During the 1974 growing season a tour of the Winters groves will be arranged. Hopefully this will include talks with growers and the receiving station set up. Trips to the Fresno area can be arranged through the Farm Advisors Fresno Office, the Dried Fig Advisory Board, or one of the processors.

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