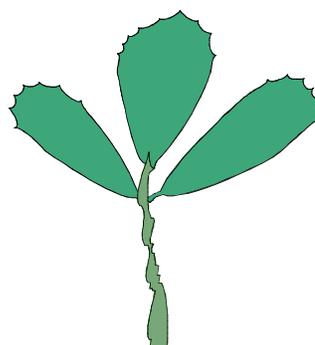


**U.C. COOPERATIVE EXTENSION**  
**SAMPLE COST TO ESTABLISH AND PRODUCE**

***ALFALFA***



**SEED PRODUCTION**  
**IMPERIAL COUNTY – 2004**

**Prepared by:**  
**Herman S Meister      Farm Advisor, U.C. Cooperative Extension, Imperial County**

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For an explanation of calculations used for the study refer to the attached General Assumptions or call the author, Herman Meister, at the Imperial County Cooperative Extension office, (760)352-9474 or e-mail at [hmeister@ucdavis.edu](mailto:hmeister@ucdavis.edu).

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University of California and the United States Department of Agriculture cooperating.

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## FOREWORD

We wish to thank growers, pest control advisors, chemical applicators and chemical dealers, custom farm operators, fertilizer dealers, seed companies, contract harvesters, equipment companies, and the Imperial County Agricultural Commissioner's office for providing us with the data necessary to compile this circular. Without their cooperation we could not have achieved the accuracy needed for evaluating the cost of production for the field crop industry in Imperial County.

The information presented herein allows one to get a "ballpark" idea of field crop production costs and practices in the Imperial County. Most of the information was collected through verbal communications via office visits and personal phone calls. The information does not reflect the exact values or practices of any one grower, but are rather an average of countywide prevailing costs and practices. Exact costs incurred by individual growers depend upon many variables such as weather, land rent, seed, choice of agrichemicals, location, time of planting, etc. No exact comparison with individual grower practice is possible or intended. The budgets do reflect, however, the prevailing industry trends within the region.

Overhead usually includes secretarial and office expenses, general farm supplies, communications, utilities, farm shop, transportation, moving farm equipment, accountants, insurance, safety training, permits, etc. Eleven to 13% of the total of land preparation, growing costs and land rent was used to estimate overhead. Hourly rates vary with each crop depending on the workman's compensation percentages.

Since all of the inputs used to figure production costs are impossible to document in a single page, we have included extra expense in man-hours or overhead to account for such items as pipe setting, motor grader, water truck, shovel work, bird and rodent control, etc. Whenever possible we have given the costs of these operations per hour listed on the cultural operations page. Some custom operators have indicated that they are instituting a "fuel surcharge" to reflect "spikes" in fuel cost.

Not included in these production costs are expenses resulting from management fees, loans, providing supervision, or return on investments. The crop budgets also do not contain expenses encumbered for road and ditch maintenance, and perimeter weed control. If all the above items were taken into account, the budget may need to be increased by 7-15%.

Where applicable we have used terminology that is commonly used in the agricultural industry. These terms are compiled in a glossary at the end of the circular. We feel that an understanding of these terms will be useful to entry-level growers, bankers, students and visitors.

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**2004-2005 Tillage & Harvest Rates  
IMPERIAL COUNTY**

Back fill furrow (melons).....9.5

**HEAVY TRACTOR WORK & LAND  
PREPARATION**

<u>OPERATION</u>	<u>\$/ACRE</u>
Plow.....	32.00
Subsoil 2 <sup>nd</sup> gear.....	45.00
Subsoil 3 <sup>rd</sup> gear.....	38.00
Landplane.....	14.00
Triplane.....	12.00
Chisel 15".....	26.00
Wil-Rich chisel.....	17.00
Big Ox.....	25.00
Slip plow.....	43.00
Mark/disc borders.....	10.50
Make cross checks (taps).....	6.75
Break border.....	6.50
Stubble disc/with cultipack.....	22.50/24.50
Regular disc/with cultipack.....	13.00/15.00
List 30"-12 row/40" 8 row.....	16.50
Float.....	11.50
Dump (scraper) borders.....	18.25
Corrugate.....	14.00

**LIGHT TRACTOR WORK**

Power mulch dry.....	27.50
Power mulch with herbicide.....	31.00
Shape 30" 6-row / 40" 4-row.....	12.75/12.75
Plant sugar beets & cotton 30"/40".....	17.00/15.00
Plant vegetables.....	20.00
Mulch plant wheat.....	20.25
Plant alfalfa (corrugated).....	18.50
Plant alfalfa (beds).....	19.00
Plant bermudagrass.....	13.75
Plant with drill (sudangrass, wheat).....	14.75
Plant corn slope.....	17.00
Cultivate 30"/40" beds 4-row.....	16.00/14.00
Spike 30"/40" beds 4-row.....	13.00/11.00
Spike and furrow out 30"/40" 4-row.....	14.00/12.00
Furrow out 30"/40" beds 4-row.....	13.00/11.00
Lilliston 30" 6-row / 40" 4-row.....	14.00/14.00
Lilliston 30" 6 row / 40" 4-row/ herb.....	15.50/15.50
Inj fert & fur out 30"/ 40" beds 4-row.....	16.50/14.50
Fertilize dry & fur out 30"/ 40" 4-row.....	17.00/15.00
Inject fertilizer flat.....	15.00
Broadcast dry fertilizer.....	8.00
Ground spray 30"/40" 8-row.....	12.00
Chop cotton stalks 30"/40"beds.....	16.00/14.00
List 80" melon beds.....	20.00
Plant 80" melon slope beds.....	22.00

Cultivate 80" melon slope beds.....	18.00
Center 80" melon beds.....	17.00
Re-run 80" melon beds.....	11.00
Inject fertilizer & furrow out 80" melon beds.....	18.00
Bust out 80" melon beds.....	12.00

**HARVEST COSTS-FIELD CROPS**

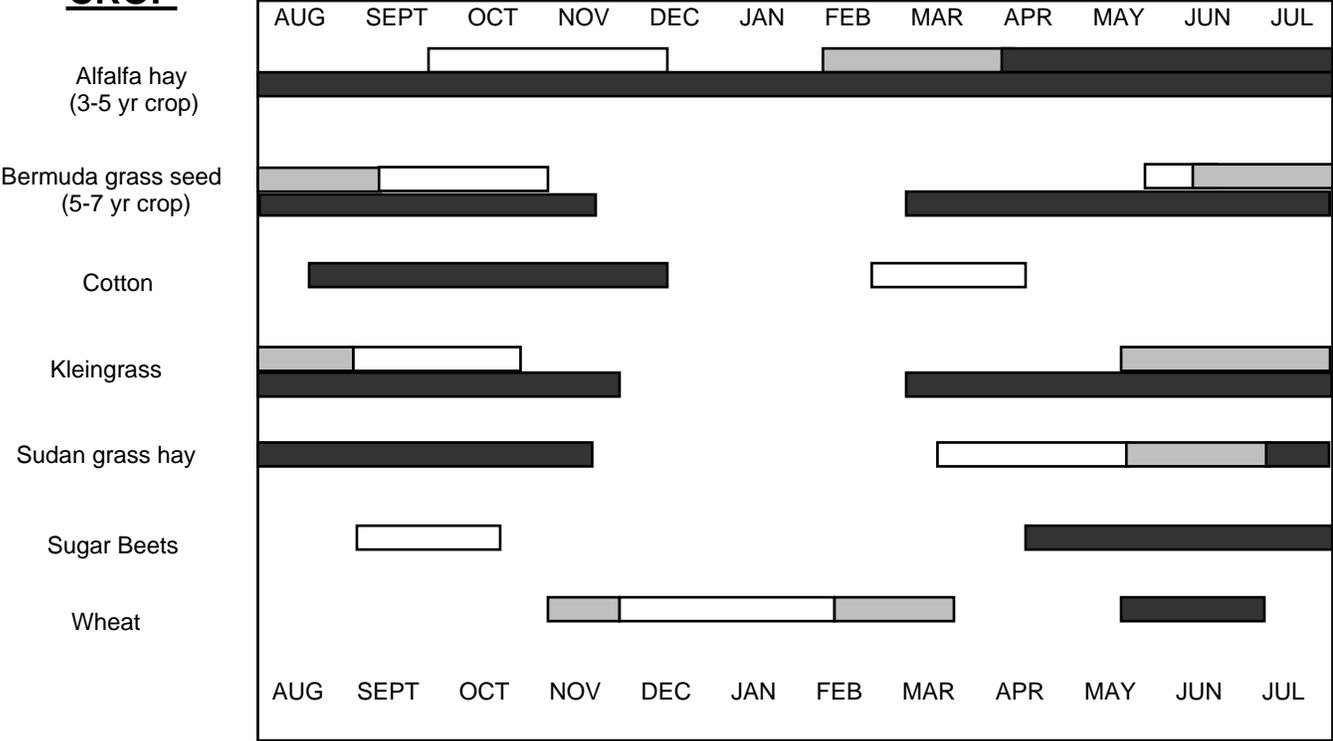
	<u>BY UNIT</u>
Windrow alfalfa seed.....	17.50/acre
Combine alfalfa seed.....	41.00/acre
Swath bermudagrass.....	13.75/acre
Rake bermudagrass.....	5.50/acre
Swath sudangrass.....	11.25/acre
Rake sudangrass.....	6.00/acre
Swath alfalfa.....	8.75/acre
Rake alfalfa.....	5.00/acre
Bale (all types of hay- small bale).....	0.70/bale
Haul & stack hay – small bale.....	0.27/bale
Bale (large bale 4X4).....	7.50/bale
Haul & stack big bale.....	3.50/bale
Load with hay squeeze.....	62.50 / load
Dig sugar beets.....	2.65/clean ton
Haul sugar beets.....	2.50/clean ton
Combine wheat ....	16.00 per acre + 0.60 /cwt. over 1 ton
Haul wheat.....	5.00/ton
Combine bermudagrass seed 1st time.....	42.50/acre
Combine bermudagrass seed 2nd time.....	26.50/acre
Haul bermudagrass seed (local).....	175/load
Pick Cotton 1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup> .....	.03cts/lb/35.00/acre

**MISCELLANEOUS RATES BY THE HOUR**

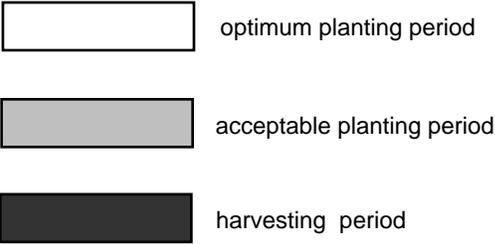
	<u>\$/HR</u>
Motor grader.....	55.00
Backhoe.....	50.00
Water truck.....	40.00
Wheel tractor.....	35.00
Scraper.....	36.00
Versatile.....	60.00
D-6.....	56.00
D-8.....	73.00
Buck ends of field.....	35.00
Pipe setting (2 men).....	38.00
Laser level.....	90.00
Work ends (disc out rotobucks).....	40.00

**FIELD CROPS  
PLANTING & HARVESTING CALENDAR  
IMPERIAL VALLEY, CALIFORNIA**

**CROP**

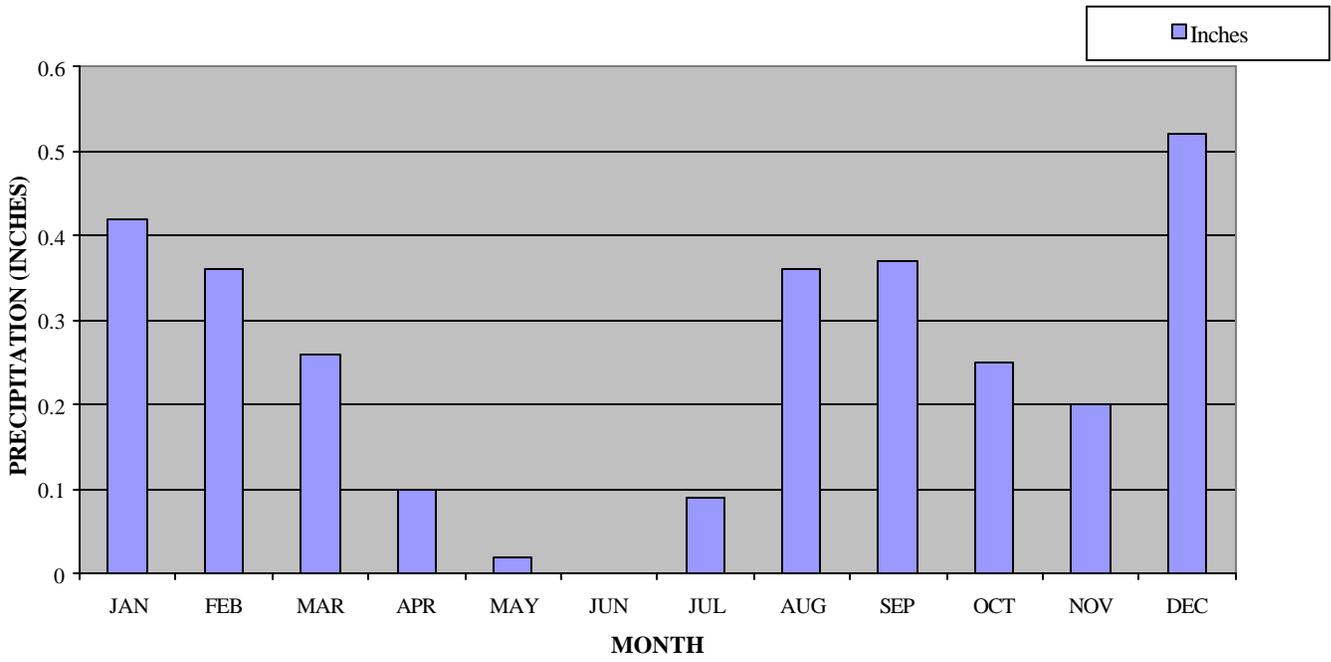
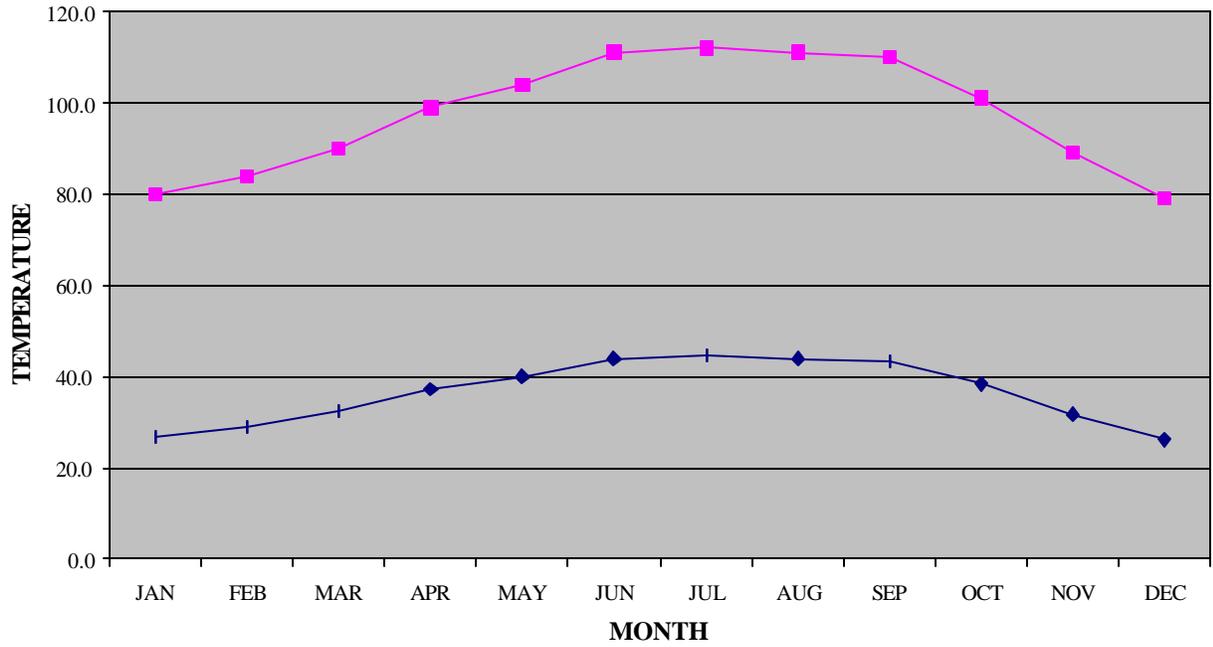
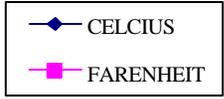


**MONTH**



# IMPERIAL COUNTY WEATHER

Imperial Irrigation District  
81 year average (1914-1994)



**IMPERIAL COUNTY PROJECTED ALFALFA SEED PRODUCTION COSTS 2004-2005**

Flat Planted Culture - 80 acre field

Mechanical operations at prevailing rates. Hand labor at \$9.45/hr (\$6.75 plus SS, workman's compensation, unemployment and fringe benefits)

Typical yield of 450 pounds of clean seed (~600 pounds noncleaned) in 90 days on an established alfalfa hay stand.

OPERATION	Prevailing Rate	Type/Amount	MATERIALS		HAND LABOR		COST Per Acre
			Cost	Hours	Dollars		
<b>SEED PRODUCTION COSTS</b>							
Irrigate 4x		Water 1.5 ac-ft	24.00	1.25	11.81		35.81
Insect control 3x	9.00	Insecticides	50.00				77.00
Bees		3 colonies @ 28.00	84.00				84.00
<b>TOTAL GROWING PERIOD COSTS</b>							<b>196.81</b>
Land rent (net acres)							115.00
Cash overhead--	11 % of growing period costs and land rent						34.30
<b>TOTAL PREHARVEST COSTS</b>							<b>346.11</b>
<b>HARVEST COSTS @ 600 pounds / acre</b>							
Windrow 1x	17.50 /acre						17.50
Combine	41.00 /acre						41.00
Hauling	175.00 truck load				~estimate		2.50
Cleaning seed	7.00 /cwt.	600 lbs non-clean seed					42.00
Bags	1.00 /cwt.	450 lbs clean seed					4.50
Seed Research Fee	0.15 /cwt.						0.68
<b>TOTAL HARVEST COSTS</b>							<b>108.18</b>
<b>TOTAL ALL COSTS</b>							<b>454.29</b>

**PROJECTED NET GAIN (PER ACRE)**

Yield Pounds clean seed/ac	Price/pound (\$)					Breakeven \$ per pound
	0.80	1.00	1.20	1.40	1.60	
200	-270	-230	-190	-150	-110	2.15
300	-202	-142	-82	-22	38	1.47
400	-134	-54	26	106	186	1.13
500	-65	35	135	235	335	0.93
600	3	123	243	363	483	0.80



## IMPERIAL COUNTY ALFALFA SEED CULTURE 2004-2005

Annual acreage, yield, and value of alfalfa seed in  
Imperial County for five consecutive years

Year	Acres	lbs/Acre	Value/Acre
2003	15,882	360	\$331
2002	12,559	392	\$368
2001	15,328	371	\$374
2000	26,462	426	\$396
1999	24,362	411	\$517

(Source: I.C. Agricultural Commissioner's Reports)

**STARTING DATES:** Starting times can vary for alfalfa seed production, but generally fall between May 1<sup>st</sup> and June 1<sup>st</sup> depending on the hay market to some degree. Most alfalfa seed is produced from hay fields that will be rotated to another crop in the fall. In recent years, more alfalfa has been planted on beds and this method is contributing to the overall production. Starting seed crops later (maturing for harvest in late August and into September) are exposed to high insect populations and weather related harvest problems. Seed crops started in April do not bloom properly and set seed poorly.

**YIELD:** Seed yields depend upon weather conditions during seed set as well as the severity of insect infestation levels and the need for pesticide applications. Heavy rain can ruin a seed crop in minutes. Seed yield per acre varies from a few hundred pounds to as much as 1,000 pounds.

Often seed is made from fields producing alfalfa hay as the main crop. Normally there is a lower rent charged against the seed crop on a hay field than one leased to grow seed alone. If a field were selected for seed only or leased for seed, the rent might be \$140 per acre or more.

**VARIETIES:** A number of non-dormant varieties, both public and proprietary, are grown in Imperial County. Any alfalfa variety may be grown for seed; however, the grower should follow seed market trends before making a decision to grow a seed crop. Some growers produce seed for their own use. Occasionally, a small acreage of dormant varieties will be grown by special arrangement if seed demand indicates good potential returns.

**IRRIGATION:** Early in the cycle, allow the plants to become water stressed to initiate bloom and prevent rank vegetative growth. After bloom begins, the plants should be irrigated no more



frequently than necessary to prevent wilting and to help produce well-filled seedpods. The flowers of a slightly stressed plant and are more attractive to bees.

**POLLINATION:** Honey bees are the preferred pollinators for alfalfa seed production. In Imperial County, it is necessary to rely on commercial honeybees or commercial solitary bees due to the lack of availability of sufficient numbers of wild bees. At least three colonies of bees per acre are needed to produce high seed yields. Five or more colonies may produce higher seed yields on fields with high seed potential. Since the price of bees is high (\$28/colony), some growers prefer to use fewer bees.

**PEST CONTROL:** Lygus control is necessary throughout the season to protect buds and young developing seeds. Stinkbugs can cause damage to maturing seed and should be controlled. Seed chalcid is best managed by proper cultural practices, as insecticides have not been cost effective. Consult your pest control advisor for information on currently registered insecticides.

As with hay production, Root rot (*Phytophthora* spp.) stem canker (*Rhizoctonia solani*) and anthracnose (*Colletotrichum trifolii*) can be severe problems.

**HARVESTING:** The seed crop may be desiccated with foliar applied desiccants or windrowed to facilitate combining. Flowering to a mature seedpod usually takes approximately 21 days.



## GLOSSARY

- 10% Bloom** stage of growth in alfalfa when 10% of the stems are flowering.
- Bale or Baling** Compacting dried alfalfa or grass into a compact package usually weighing 100-120 lbs.
- Bed** Mounded soil that is shaped and used for planting; beds are separated by furrows.
- Berry** see *kernel*
- Big Ox®** A chisel with 7 shanks used to rip soil 18-24 inches deep.
- Blacken the beds** To thoroughly wet/darken a bed with irrigation water applied in furrows.
- Black point** Darkened, sometimes shriveled embryo end of wheat seed; caused by several fungi including *Alternaria*, *Fusarium*, and *Helminthosporium*; also called kernel smudge.
- Bleach** Loss of green color in hay due to sun exposure.
- Boot stage** Stage of wheat development when the sheath surrounding the inflorescence expands.
- Break borders** To tear down flat flood borders or flat crop borders.
- Broadcast** To spread seed on the soil surface.
- Buck ends of field** The remaking of beds at the end of a field in order to channel when beds at the end of a field are destroyed due to insufficient turn around space for farm equipment.
- Chisel** A tractor-mounted, knifelike implement used to rip soil 15-20 inches deep.
- Corrugation** Ridges made in soil to control the flow of water down a field (mini-beds). Name stems from the resemblance to corrugated sheet metal.
- Crimping** Mechanical operation used to crush stems of hay for better curing.
- Cross checks** Small dikes at perpendicular angles to borders used for water diversion into a field; also called taps.
- Cultipacker** A farm implement used to break up clods of soil; consists of groups of knobbed metal rings stacked together; also called a ringroller.
- Cultivate** To work beds after planting in order to control weeds, loosen soil, and allow for application of fertilizer
- Custom rate** The value assigned to a cultural operation by farmers or contractors for cost accounting; normally includes the cost of the operator.
- Cwt of CWT** One hundred pounds
- Damping-off** A fungal disease of seedlings
- Dough stage** Stage of wheat kernel development, when kernels are mature, but not hardened.
- Dormant varieties** Alfalfa varieties which do not produce much growth in cold weather.
- Drill** Type of planter used for cereals.
- Dump borders** See *scraper borders*
- Eagle beak** Type of planter shoe shaped like an eagle's beak used in mulch planting crops such as wheat.
- Float** A large, wooden frame pulled with a tractor for rough leveling of the soil surface.
- Flood irrigation** A method of irrigation where water is applied a field by gravity; the water is channeled by earth borders that are usually 70-200 feet apart.
- Full bloom** Alfalfa blooming at maximum potential.
- Furrow irrigation** A method of irrigation where water is applied to fields by gravity flow, down furrows; the water enters the bed by capillary action.
- Furrow out** The movement of soil from furrows to beds by tractor-mounted shovels; removes impediments to irrigation water.
- Grated pipe** Large diameter pipes used to deliver low pressure water to each furrow; used to keep head end of field dry for cultivation or harvesting.
- Green chop** Alfalfa that is cut green and dehydrated for making alfalfa pellets.
- Ground spray** The application of an agrichemical by a tractor-mounted sprayer.
- Inject fertilizer** The application of liquid or liquid fertilizer in the top or sides of a bed.
- Irrigate up** To irrigate a crop to emergence.
- Kernel smudge** See *black point*.
- Landplane** A large, tractor-pulled land leveling machine.
- Laser level** A land surface leveler that uses a laser guiding device to maintain an accurate grade.
- Layby** To apply an herbicide or other agrichemical at the last opportunity to enter a field with a tractor prior to harvest.
- Lilliston** A rolling cultivator with curved tines which uses ground speed to assist in working up the soil surface in order to destroy weeds.
- Listing** Throwing soil into a mound to make beds.
- Lodge** Cereals falling over due to the weight of the seed and lack of stem strength.
- Motor grader** A large grader normally used to cut tail ditches for draining off excess surface water.

- Mulch plant** Planting seed into moist soil; no additional irrigation needed to germinate crop.
- Noncruciferous** Any crop other than members of the cabbage family (e.g., broccoli, brussels sprouts, cauliflower, etc.)
- Nondeterminant** Describes a plant's growth habit; plant size is not determined and may increase (within limits) as long as proper growth conditions exist.
- Off types** Plant types whose characteristics differ from those of the true variety.
- Pipe setting** Installing 2-inch plastic tubes through a soil berm with a hydraulic ram; the pipes are used to control the flow of irrigation water.
- Pinch wheel** Type of sugar beet harvester which grasps the beet leaves by pinching.
- Planting to stand** Planting the same number of seeds as the desired number of plants in a field.
- Plow** To mix soil by inversion.
- Power mulch** A tractor-mounted, power rototiller.
- Pull borders** To make flood berms used to channel the flow of surface applied water.
- Punching pipe** see *pipe setting*.
- Raking** Rolling hay to a windrow in order to dry, or combining windrows.
- Random flow planter** A non-precision planter; seed drop is regulated by agitating the seed in a hopper over a hole; planting rate depends upon hole size and tractor speed.
- Rank growth** Excessive growth.
- Roll beds** To roll a large, metal roller over the tops of beds in order to firm them prior to thinning.
- Rototill** To mechanically mix soil.
- Row** A line of plants or a bed with a single line of plants.
- Scald** Death of plants due to excessive soil moisture during period of high temperature causing lack of oxygen to the plant roots; e.g., alfalfa, bermuda grass, and sudan grass.
- Scraper borders** Method of making borders without leaving low spots in soil within the area to be planted; helps to prevent water puddling thus preventing scald and root diseases.
- Seed line** A line down a bed in which seeds are planted.
- Semolina flour** Flour made from Durum wheat and used to make pasta.
- Shatter** Loss of grain from the seed heads prior to harvest, often caused by wind or moisture.
- Sidedress** To place pesticides or fertilizers in a band next to a row of plants.
- Slip plow** An implement pulled by a caterpillar and used to make deep cuts into the soil whereby soil from below is carried upward into the cut; used to improve drainage.
- Solitary bees** Type of bee used for pollination which lives alone, not in colonies.
- Spike** The running of tractor-mounted shanks into the soil or beds to improve aeration and drainage.
- Spike wheel** Type of sugar beet harvester using long metal spikes to penetrate the beets and hold them while lifting them out of the ground.
- Stand** The density of plants in a field after emergence.
- Stubble disc** An implement used to chop crop residue and incorporate it into the soil; the blades are scalloped unlike a standard disc..
- Subbing** Irrigation method where water is applied to a field in furrows and allowed to travel across beds by capillary action.
- Subsoil** The pulling of large, hard-faced shanks through the soil up to 42 inches deep; used to shatter soil layers and improve drainage, and leach salts.
- Top crop** Cotton bolls set at the top of the plant; the late crop.
- Triplane** A smaller, three-wheeled version of a *landplane*.
- Versatile** A large 4-wheel drive tractor used to pull discs and other implements.
- Water back** Irrigate again, often after sprinkling.
- Water fun** An application of an agrichemical in irrigation water (i.e., furrow irrigation).
- Wil-rich chisel plow** An implement used to work wet or moist soils prior to making beds.
- Windrow** Forage cut from the plants and raked into a single line for curing and baling.
- Work ends** Miscellaneous field operations including use of a motor grader to cut a tail ditch for irrigation drain water; or bucking ends and pipe punching.
- Yellowberry** wheat kernels that are yellow rather than the normal opaque; usually the result of insufficient, nitrogen fertilization.