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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION

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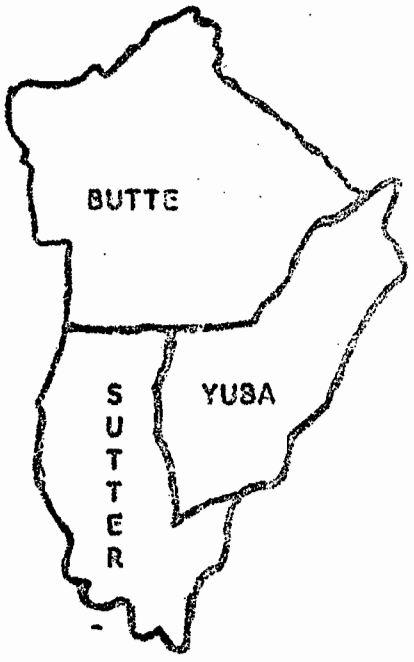

PRUNES

SAMPLE COSTS OF ESTABLISHMENT AND PRODUCTION

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PRUNE PRODUCTION

1971 Acreage	Bearing	Non Bearing	Total
Butte	6,877	1,740	8,617
Yuba	6,842	2,620	9,462
Sutter	14,799	2,208	17,007
California	95,700	14,000	109,700

Outlook:

A few prunes are grown in the Northwest, otherwise California is the exclusive producer of dried prunes in the United States. Ninety-five percent of the prunes grown in California are of the French type, historically known as Prune d'Agen. The other five per cent are made up mainly of Imperials, Robe de Sergeant, Sugar, and various other specialty plantings. Heavy plantings in the Sacramento Valley have occurred with shifting of production from the coastal areas. Per capita consumption of dry prunes and juice has not kept pace with production.

Recently, the Federal Marketing Order under which prunes are regulated has been amended to allow "undersized" dried prunes to be declared non-prunes and unsalable. The size of the dried prune to be declared "undersized" will be determined by the size of each year's crop and be removed with either a 23/32 inch, 24/32 inch, or 25/32 inch screen. With the disposal of the 1970 surplus, success of the new sales campaign, use of the new size regulation to it's full potential, and barring any great new acreage planted in the next few years, the outlook for prunes looks promising for the near future.

Growing Conditions:

Prunes grow well, are longer lived and produce well on deeper soils which are well drained. The trees can be planted on shallower and less well drained soil than peaches or almonds. On these locations, growers should expect less production, shorter life, and more blow-over problems. The majority of prunes produced in these three counties are on the shallow and heavy soils.

Prunes have few diseases, but need spray protection from worms, aphids, scale, and mites. A delayed dormant spray for insects is all that is needed in many years for insect control. In some years additional sprays may be needed to control late coming worms, aphids, and mites. In wet years a full-bloom spray is necessary to prevent fruit russet scab, and a pre-harvest spray is sometimes necessary to prevent fruit brown rot.

A major problem of prune production in the Sacramento Valley is tree die-back, caused by potassium deficiency. Potassium deficiency and die-back usually comes with large crops. Orchards on heavy soil or in potassium deficient soils can have die-back even with moderate crops. Potassium deficiency can be at least partially corrected with potassium nitrate sprays applied every two weeks starting in May, or potassium sulfate injected into the soil. If left unchecked, die-back is followed by sunburn, a disease known as Cytospora, and wood boring insects. The orchard then generally goes into a steady decline.

With large crops, potassium deficiency, and tree die-back; comes small fruit size. Blossom thinning with dinitro has been available but is risky and has not been widely used. Recently, studies with mechanical shaker thinning in May has been shown to be a practical way of reducing crop and increasing fruit size without undesirable side effects and little risk.

Growers use contour flood, furrow, or sprinkler irrigation. On the shallow or heavy soils, furrow and sprinkler irrigation is preferred to contour flood.

Harvest:

The harvest and drying are the largest cash costs in prune growing. Well cared for orchards normally produce economically until 30 to 35 years of age. Prunes usually begin producing a crop in the fifth year and will probably pay for production expenses in their seventh year. The crop adapts itself well to mechanical harvesting operations. Cooperative or commercial drying is practiced by many growers in order to avoid the heavy capital outlays required for private dehydrator installations.