

LT-BA-72

PRODUCTION FACTS**HEAD LETTUCE**

Lettuce is the leading vegetable crop grown in Contra Costa County. It accounts for more than one-third of the vegetable acreage and over one-half of the income. During the 10-year period from 1962 through 1971 the average acreage was 3,730 with an average gross return of nearly 4.5 million. During this period the annual average gross return from agricultural production was over \$31 million, 26% of which was from vegetables.

The major part of the Contra Costa lettuce crop is raised in the Brentwood area following a crop of barley or sweet corn.

Planting generally begins during the last week of July and ends the first week of September.

Harvesting usually begins during the last week of September and continues through October and into November depending on the weather.

CULTURAL OPERATIONS

Production Methods - The production of head lettuce is fairly well standardized. Cultural operations include land preparation, planting, irrigation, cultivation, thinning, weed control, fertilization, and pest control. Land preparation is similar to that followed for other vegetable crops.

Seed is planted with a spacing of 1/2 to 2 inches between seeds in two double rows on the surface of the bed. The resultant stand is a thin line of seedlings, requiring fewer hours of hand labor to thin to the desired stand.

With reduced seeding rates, weed control is more essential and requires a relatively weed-free soil or the use of chemical herbicides. The herbicides used will depend on the weed species involved.

Thinning the stand and weeding in the plant row is done by hand labor. Various commercially available synchronous mechanical thinners are being used on a limited scale. A few farmers are planting to the desired stand and eliminating the thinning operation if they are confident they have a good weed control and favorable conditions for germination.

Harvesting - Harvesting operations for field-packed lettuce begin with assembling, stitching and distribution of cartons in the field. The lettuce is harvested by a crew that moves from field to field. Workers select, cut, and trim mature heads and place them butt up on the growing bed. Other workers follow and pack the lettuce into cartons (24 to a carton). The packed heads are sprayed with water and the cartons are closed by hand stapling. Closed cartons are windrowed and loaded by hand onto trucks for hauling to the vacuum cooler. In a few cases, the entire harvesting operation may be completed in one field cutting. Usually, however, an average of two cuttings are required to complete the harvest of a lettuce field.

SAMPLE COSTS TO PRODUCE LETTUCE IN CONTRA COSTA COUNTY, 1972

YIELD: 550 Cartons/Acre

	Man Labor Per Acre		Cash Costs Per Acre		Total per Acre
	Hours	Cost	Equip-ment	Materials and Other Costs	
PRE-HARVEST CASH COSTS:					
Land Preparation List & Preplant Fertilizer (contract)	3.6	9.00	14.40	4.00	23.40 4.00
Plant (incorporate herbicide & shape bed)	0.7	1.75	3.75		5.50
Thin (contract)				55.00	55.00
Hoe (contract)				27.50	27.50
Cultivate 4X & Fertilize	3.0	7.50	5.70		13.20
Irrigate 6X	15.0	30.00			30.00
Spray or Dust 7X Contract				100.00	100.00
Misc. Cultural Costs	3.0	6.75	4.58		11.33
Irrigation - power to pump 30A. inches @ 8.00 A/ft.				20.00	20.00
Seed 1/2 lb/A @ \$16.00/lb.				8.00	8.00
Fertilizer 120# N, 45# P ₂ O ₅ , 20# K				25.00	25.00
Herbicide, Balon + IPC				26.00	26.00
Misc. Materials				2.00	2.00
PRE-HARVEST COSTS	25.3	55.00	28.43	267.50	350.93
HARVESTING:					
Contract @ 1.40/Cartron (includes selling) based on 550 Haul Cartons/A Contract					770.00
TOTAL HARVEST COSTS					770.00
TOTAL CULTURAL & HARVEST COSTS					1120.93
Cash Overhead (office, insurance, interest on operating money, etc.)					67.25
County Taxes on Equipment					2.00
Cash Rent -- \$125.00 @ 75%					93.75
Total Cash Overhead					163.00
TOTAL CASH COSTS					1,283.93
	Investment Per Acre	Depreciation	Interest 7%		
Irrigation Facilities	125.00	6.25	4.38		
Equipment	125.00	12.50	4.38		
TOTAL	250.00	18.75	8.76		
Total Depreciation					18.75
Total Interest on Investment					8.76
TOTAL COST OF PRODUCTION PER ACRE					1,311.44
TOTAL COST PER CARTON - Based on 550 Cartons/Acre					2.38
LABOR:					
Skilled - \$2.50 per/hr. (Includes Social Security, Workmans Compensation and other fringe benefits)					
Unskilled - \$2.00 per/hr. benefits)					

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