



The olive-branch of peace in Madera bears ten per cent profit

Madera a Pathway to Prosperity

A California County Where Vineyards Rival Those of Foreign Fame—Profits in Diversified Farming—Olive Orchards as Good as Gold-Mines

By A. J. WELLS

WHEN one who had written eloquently about California first went into the Yosemite valley, he threw up his hands in despair: "I am self-convicted as a spendthrift in words." He was bankrupt in adjectives.

So we feel amid the attractions of these valley counties. We give it up, as the Queen of Sheba did when she saw the estates of Solomon. We shall file a petition as an insolvent word-monger.

In Madera county, while fully committed to the "little farm well tilled," they still farm by miles, and the plowman is too much concerned about getting across the field and back in time for lunch to note, as Burns did, the daisy or the mouse nest which the plowshare turns up.

One big holding embraces fourteen huge ranches, all connected by telephone, touching each other yet using one hundred and thirty miles of wire. On one ranch are fifteen artesian wells, and fifty thousand acres are rented for farm uses by individuals. Of other holdings the Chowchilla has ninety-one thousand acres; the Sharon thirty-two thousand five hundred; the Adobe twenty-two thousand, the Daulton seventeen thousand five hundred. The man with a modest free-hold of one hundred and sixty acres is up against some big neighbors. But if he has but eighty acres in alfalfa, he gets from it as much net every year as his neighbor does who farms eight times as much to wheat. And he plants a refreshing green in a wide monotony of yellow fields.

The farmer of a few acres need not be called a "small" farmer, if, as one assured me, he could get \$50 an acre from his peach orchard and let the other fellow plow and irrigate, pick and ship, leaving the owner nothing to do but pay the taxes, after having planted the orchard and brought it into full bearing. When we asked another about the value of his olive orchard, he said it paid him ten per cent on a valuation of \$2,500 an acre. Perhaps the ancients knew what they were talking about when they said that "an olive orchard is a gold-mine on top of the ground."

A vineyard of one hundred and twenty acres is said by the *Madera Tribune* to have increased IF value from \$10,000 to \$50,000 in eleven years paying ten per cent on the latter valuation.

In another instance, a 20-acre field yields an average income of \$1,200. It has returned \$1,800, but has never fallen below \$1,000. It includes alfalfa, berries, peaches and cream, and the owner gets the cream of country life without having to "spread himself" over a whole "section" of farm-land. Divide a township, Editor Clark says, into twenty-acre farms like this and farm it after the methods of this man, and it would yield an income of \$1,382,- 400. That is to say, in California and in Madera county. Who would not want to live in the center of that township? The roads would have to be widened to accommodate the automobiles of farmers.

The west side of Madera means west of the Southern Pacific and south and west to the San Joaquin river. It is a prosperous and attractive section of the "proved" fruit-lands, sloping gently to the river, close to the underlying fountains of water and is well drained. These are not lowlands, but they are the lower lands of the county, are a feast to the eye in the beauty and bounty of their crops and in the color and richness of the soil.

The unimproved lands of this section are within a radius of from three to seven miles of the county-seat and can be bought at prices ranging from \$50 to \$120 an acre.

A big vineyard of fifteen hundred acres is in the midst of this section, and in the picking season one hundred and fifty men are employed. The Italian-Swiss Colony has proved the fertility of these lands; the men who control the great properties of the colony are scientific men who declare that these lands will grow the best sweet wine-grapes in the state, equal to any in France, Italy or Spain.

The value of a vineyard is attested by the prices received from a thirty-acre tract here. In three years a young vineyard returned \$10,743.60, or over \$118 an acre.

The east side is the region of grain-fields, but the character of the soil is about the same for general farming, fruit and vine-growing, though not so fully proved. This is true of a large area until the rolling lands and foothills are approached. The water underlying this section is found at lower depths, but is available for pumping, rising in the well within reach of the pumps in use.

Much land at present can only produce grain with profit, and as it still pays to grow grain, the east side of the county will continue to turn yellow with its annual harvests. Lands are growing in value; there is a demand for wheat; good farming methods will here produce ten sacks to the acre, and this will pay. Good land, clean and ready for the plow, can be bought for from \$20 to \$30 an acre, and aside from other uses than that of producing wheat or barley, it will increase in value and is to-day a good investment. A pioneer, now old and wealthy, has for half a century grown grain only and invested the proceeds in grain-lands, and he says it pays to raise wheat. He knows.

The county runs back to the crest of the Sierra, and there are rich forests, and in one section a mountain of minerals, of which iron is the principal. Up to twenty-five hundred feet above the sea, diversified farming will prove profitable, two

products alone being staple—hay and apples. For twenty-two years an old resident of the region whom I met grew two tons to the acre on a plat of five acres. And hay is in demand by the teamsters on their rounds and commands from \$20 to 830 a ton.

There is good money in apples in California, whenever the right elevation is found and transportation is not too serious a problem. Here in time will be an electric line (it is already surveyed), and then an apple orchard on one of these hillsides, to be had now for \$10 to \$20 an acre, naked, will make a fortune for the man who knows how to plant and care for it.

Here, too, up to thirteen hundred feet, oranges and lemons will thrive, and English walnuts, grapes and olives. A good living can be won from the soil by producing the usual farm crops, and in addition an income from fruit and nuts, to say nothing of the comfort of living where you can grow your own semi-tropic fruits and raise your own table-grapes and nuts and go berrying on your own grounds half the year.

Electric power is supplied by the mountain streams and is available for all kinds of enterprises that take power, including irrigation by pumping. The capacity of the San Joaquin Light and Power Company is about seventy-five hundred horsepower, but is being greatly enlarged. About six hundred men are at work, and the total expenditure will aggregate five or six million dollars. Much of the territory now covered is distinctly agricultural, but cheap power will invite factories as well as create irrigated farms, and as great ranches are subdivided and improved, small farms will add to the population.

This is the great feature of the county—its underground fountains. They are reached by wells usually from thirty to sixty feet, and a centrifugal pump does the rest. For orchards, water is required once a year, in April; vineyards do not need more irrigation on these proved lands than the orchards.

The cost of pumping is not at all prohibitive, the average being a little in excess of gravity water. There is some advantage in the pumping system after it is established. You are master of the situation: you are free from "ditch troubles," riparian right questions, and from the irritation which comes from the failure of the ditch company to deliver water when you need it. Besides this, you are not likely to use too much water, and you use it when you want it most, and consult your own convenience so far as crops will let you. The pump is a feature in many places where there are gravity systems. It is not a makeshift.

There are several gravity systems in the county, but two of them serve only their own lands, which are extensive. The Madera canal covers a district of about sixteen thousand acres, and it will serve to show the status of things among the farmers to point out how water from this canal is used. Alfalfa, 600 acres; raisin and wine-grapes, 3,500; orchards, 1,000; growing grain, 4,000. On a ranch of eighty acres here five hundred tons of alfalfa are cut. In this case the water is raised by a pump discharging twenty-five hundred gallons a minute.

The canal can supply but a little of the area needing water, but there are no failures to find the underground supplies, and a pump lifts it inexpensively into

the distributing ditches. The water-level is maintained in the wells, no matter how many are bored, and the future supply is guaranteed by the snows of the Sierra,

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