

## Agricultural Employment and Irrigated Cropland in California

For this month's edition of the CED's Map of the Month series, we examined the importance of agriculture in the state by looking at two different metrics: the amount of each county's workforce employed in the agricultural industry, and the amount of each county's total land area that is currently used for irrigated agriculture. With the potential of March rains erasing some of the pains of California's ongoing drought, these two metrics allow us to see how drought conditions trickle down to each county's overall economy. As with many variables, there is a high degree of variation both within CSU, Chico's 12-county service region, and between our service region and the rest of the state.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2013 County Business Patterns, just over 1.5 percent of California's workers were employed in the agricultural industry. This figure includes those working directly for agricultural enterprises, as well as those employed by agricultural support industries that may specialize in soil preparation, planting, pesticide application, or similar activities. Monterey County had the largest percentage of its residents working in the agricultural industry at 16.1 percent of overall employment – in no small part due to Salinas Valley's role as "America's Salad Bowl". Within the CSU, Chico Service Region, 2.6 percent of all workers were employed in the agricultural sector. The county with the highest percentage of workers in the sector was Colusa County at 14.7 percent, followed by Glenn County at 10.7 percent. In our service region's more urban counties, Shasta and Butte, overall employment in the sector was much lower at 0.6 percent and at 1.6 percent respectively. Within our region's mountainous such as Siskiyou, Modoc, and Lassen, where agricultural production is limited to such crops as alfalfa in fertile valleys, employment in the sector fell mostly in the low single digits.

We also looked at data provided by the United States Geological Survey (USGS) to show the portion of each county's land area currently used for irrigated agriculture. It is important to note that overall agricultural land use is much greater in most locations, as this figure does not include lands irrigated by private wells or fields not requiring irrigation. Statewide, San Joaquin County has the highest amount of its land

area dedicated to irrigated croplands at 53.1 percent, followed by Stanislaus County at 44 percent. Counties on the westward (drier) side of both the San Joaquin and Sacramento valleys tended to have the highest amounts of land area dedicated to irrigated cropland. Within the CSU, Chico Service Region, irrigated croplands accounted for a high of 41.1 percent of land in Sutter County, followed by 26.1 percent of land in Colusa County. With much of this irrigation dependent on reservoir storage and withdrawals from the Sacramento and Feather rivers, a strong rainy season and a return to normal snow packs in the Sierra and Coastal Range will be especially important to those counties.

Sources: [U.S. Census Bureau's 2013 County Business Patterns](#)

[United States Geological Survey \(USGS\)](#)