YUMA CITRUS ACREAGE EXPANSION IS FORECAST

By R. E. Grounds

Irrigation districts along the lower Colorado River offer many well-suited lands for citrus expansion. These comprise six districts in Arizona — Yuma Valley, Yuma Mesa, North Gila, South Gila, Wellton Mohawk and Parker — and four in California — Imperial, Bard, Coachella and Blythe.

In addition to these districts using Colorado River water, there are several pump areas that show good possibilities for citrus development.

Cite Many Advantages

As a quick review, the advantages of citrus culture in the lower Colorado River area are lower land prices than in the coastal areas, quantity and quality of water necessary to grow good trees and produce fruit, warm weather in selected locations, low insect population, a more disease free area, highly colored fruits, high yields, low taxes, better labor supply, adequate marketing by most major companies, and research stations for future assistance.

The disadvantages are few, and will be lessened as growers change practices and become aware of damage that may occur to the tree and its crop. Some of these disadvantages are high light intensity and consequent sunburn; hot dry winds at certain times of the year; lack of adequate by-product facilities near by, and distance between the different growing areas.

Estimated Potentials

The potential citrus acreages mentioned below are only estimates based on information gathered about the specified areas. These new areas may change rather quickly with the economic situation of the United States, and with increased knowledge of water usage and new rootstocks.

Potential acreages in the Arizona water districts: Yuma Valley, 10,000 acres; Yuma Mesa, 1500 acres; North Gila, 3000 acres; South Gila, 4000 acres if Colorado River water source is used; Wellton Mohawk Valley, Mesa area and Dome part of valley, 16,000 acres; Parker Mesa, 4000 acres when and if water is brought up.

Potential areas outside of the irrigation districts in Yuma County include the Hyder-Horn area, 8000 acres; the Aztec area, 3000 acres, and the South Yuma Mesa (below the district), 16,000 acres. All of these pump areas have water quality problems that need to be overcome by casing poor quality stratas off and handling the water correctly in cultural management to keep salt accumulations from developing.

These potentials, in the two paragraphs above, total 37,500 acres within Arizona water districts and 27,000 acres outside of the irrigation districts, or a grand total for Yuma County of 54,500. This impressive total compares with approximately 24,000 acres of citrus plantings in Yuma County at present.

Potential California Areas

Potential acreages in the California irrigation districts: Blythe area mesa, 17,000 acres if a Colorado River water source is used; Bard, 10,000 acres if high water corrections are employed; Imperial Valley, 20,000 acres in the warmer areas; Coachella, 6000 acres using river water and tile where necessary.

Pump areas outside of these districts are not well known, except the Borrego Springs area with a potential of 2000 acres. Many of these areas are already being pushed by subdivisions nearby and will most likely not reach their citrus acreage capacity.

With the continued influx of people into the coastal cities of California, the remaining citrus acreage will slowly diminish. As this occurs, a large proportion of this reduction will be planted in areas of the lower Colorado River. The development of salt tolerant rootstocks and improved varieties, along with freedom from diseases resulting from the new registration and certification programs in both Arizona and California, will help develop these areas.

Bob Grounds is county agricultural agent in Yuma County, and the man who keeps a constant running tally on citrus acreage in that lush and productive area. His article, reprinted here, appeared first in THE CALIFORNIA CITROGRAPH, and is reprinted through permission of Editor Gerald R. Strauss.