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# Yes, California's agricultural bounty is growing

**F**ACTS BE DAMNED ... well, if you listen to certain folks with a political ax to grind, you'd think the last acre of California farmland was about to be paved over by greedy developers ... which is not to say there aren't greedy developers and paving is not going on ...

However, for those of us who actually take Sunday rides and enjoy the agricultural bounty of the Central Valley, it sure looks as if more crops than ever are being grown ... yes, formerly idle fields are now being planted with walnuts and prunes and pistachios and grapes ...

And, thanks to the good and intelligent folks at the Rural California Report — where they work more about facts than agendas — I now know that these observations are not mere illusion ...

On the front page of the Spring 1999 Rural California Report, in a revealing piece by Don Villarejo and Shaw Perrin, I learned that in the five-year period from 1992-1997 — the most recent statistics available — the statewide farm-

land devoted to orchards increased by 336,000 acres, reaching the highest total in California history ...

I am not making this up ... yes, the word is "increased," not "decreased" ... better yet, according to Villarejo and Perrin — neither of whom is a developer, greedy or otherwise — "In 1997 vegetables were harvested on a record total of 1,209,259 acres, up 19 percent from the 1992 harvest" ... wow ... put that in your "dwindling prime agland" pipe and smoke it ...

In the same five-year period, harvested cropland in the Central Valley increased by a whopping 640,000 acres ... furthermore, "In 1997, farmers received more income from the sales of agricultural products than ever before, up by 24 percent in real terms over 1992 figures. The greatest increases in farm sales were reported for vegetable, fruit, nut and berry crops. And farmers reported record high prices and record high production in a number of important crops, most notably wine grapes." ...

Additionally, note Villarejo and Perrin: "These findings from



**Bob Dunning**  
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the Census and the CAC (California County Agricultural Commissioners) underscore the most important trend in the state's agriculture: the intensification of agricultural production." ...

Yes, we need to protect and preserve our farmland ... but we can do it much more intelligently with facts such as these than the uninformed agendas of the sky-is-falling crowd ...

**AND FURTHERMORE** ... the thing I especially like about the Rural California Report is that conclusions are based upon factual analysis, not preconceived notions dictated by

the wild jerking on one's knee ... generally, when it comes to this issue, people don't want to be confused by facts, they've already made up their minds ...

For instance, according to Villarejo and Perrin, "As farmers in other parts of the U.S. complain about the lowest grain prices since the Great Depression, and hog farmers bitterly protest prices that have fallen by a factor of three in the last year alone, California farmers have quietly planted more vegetables, trees and vines than ever before."

"The key to the success of California agriculture has been its ability to muster the resources needed to take advantage of the mild climate, excellent soils and key location to access Pacific Rim markets."

"The most important of these resources are reliable water supplies, labor and an infrastructure that can assure prompt marketing of highly perishable commodities. The protection of these resources to insure a healthy California farm economy is far more

pressing than the threat of urbanization." ...

Villarejo, by the way, is retiring tomorrow after 22 years as executive director of the California Institute for Rural Studies, which publishes the Rural California Report ... his wonderful insight and intelligence will be sorely missed ...

**APOLOGIES ALL AROUND** ... I don't know about you, but I was darn glad to see that the mayor of this esteemed burg apologized to City Manager John Meyer for saying that Meyer said city staffers don't know council members all the time ... I think that's double hearsay, a felony all by itself ...

The mayor's puppeteers pulled her aside to tell her that Meyer has higher approval ratings than she does, so she'd better say "I'm sorry" and get on with things while she still has a constituency left ...

She still, however, has not apologized to Nugget owner Eric Stille for slandering him in public two weeks ago, an offense far worse than the one visited upon John Meyer ...