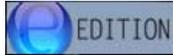




Monday, March 12, 2001

Valley field yields record carrot crop

By **DARREN SIMON**, Staff Writer



Sunday, March 11, 2001 10:00 PM PST



When a field produces more than 2,000 boxes of carrots per acre, it is considered an above-average harvest and gives a farmer cause to celebrate.



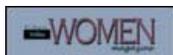
Local farmer Carl Russell has hit the jackpot with a yield of 3,450 boxes of carrots per acre this year on 5.6 acres of land.



According to Russell's contracted harvester, Cream of the Crop of Brawley, that yield topped the state record, which was 3,300 boxes harvested in the Salinas area.



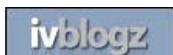
"It is very amazing to see," said Albert Felix of Cream of the Crop as he stood with Russell in his carrot field near the corner of Brandt and Eddins roads in the county's Northend recently. "It is a state record."



Russell, whose family has farmed in the Valley since the 1940s, looked over one of his fields yet to be harvested.



His livelihood depends on the success of the crop. As he looked over the rows of green, knowing the orange below is strong and healthy, he was proud of the record he has claimed.



"It's really encouraging and I hope someone can do better in the future," Russell said. "Farming has been so down, it is good to see a bright spot. It gives some hope for the future."



Russell owes the success of his carrot crop to the growth of technology in the agricultural industry.



Computers and satellites helped guide Russell and those he works with in deciding how much fertilizer to use and placing the fertilizer with pinpoint accuracy to assure success of the field.



"It's an intense way of looking at soil fertilization," said Aron Quist of Stanworth Crop Consulting of Imperial, the company contracted by Russell to do fertilization analysis and provide global satellite systems consulting.



Quist said by taking soil samples on sections of the field and using satellites, it is possible to determine the nutrients in each section of the field that must be dealt with, such as salinity levels.



Quist said he can then develop a color-coded graph of the field that shows how much fertilizer is needed and other steps that might be necessary such as soil leaching to remove salinity.



"Globalization is a way of making sure you are getting the most use out of the field," Quist said. "It helps us to identify the problems, where they are and what we need to do to solve them."



Quist said "precision application" can help cut fertilizer costs and increase yields.

He said last year about 4,000 acres of farmland in the Imperial Valley were fertilized with the help of the global satellite system.

As Russell stood in one of the worst areas of his field, an area of high salinity that should have experienced a 25-percent reduction in yield, he marveled at the green surrounding him.

"When you do something right, it is a great feeling," Russell said, adding in a world where competition makes farming a tough industry "you have to do everything right."

He added, "It's been a tough year for everyone in the Valley and it's not just in the Valley. It's difficult from one ocean to the other."

Russell said he is proud to be a farmer, adding he has followed the lead of his late father, Milas

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Russell, in growing produce.

He added for three years it has been difficult to make a profit in farming. Last year he did not make a profit.

He said it is difficult to compete against the world market, but finding new and more intelligent ways to farm will make a difference.

"It makes us confident that we can compete," he said. "You have to find a way to have a good yield and have good quality in order to compete."

Russell added, "We learn something new every day. We are constantly learning how to do things better."

Russell said he wants to see all farmers in the Imperial Valley succeed and for farming to thrive. He said if someone had a higher yield, he would celebrate that farmer's achievement.

"I am happy when my neighbors make money," he said.

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