

OVERVIEW OF CALIFORNIA ALFALFA PRODUCTION

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Alfalfa is the most versatile of all the forage crops. The diversity in alfalfa ecotypes and varieties allows this forage plant to be grown in a wide range of world latitudes, elevations, and climatic conditions. Alfalfa's versatility also extends to its harvesting, processing, and utilization. The remarkable adaptability of alfalfa to various production climates, soil conditions, and harvesting methods and consistency of forage quality allows this crop a prominent position in world wide forage production.

In California, alfalfa is an important cash crop in every agricultural county. The climatic and growing conditions within California are as diverse as can be found in any other state. From North to South there are such extremes in elevations, climates, soils, and general production practices that the state is divided into seven separate production areas. The major differences between these production areas or climate zones are the length of the growing season and the range between temperature extremes. The California climate zones for alfalfa production are listed as follows:

1. Low Desert--Desert areas of Imperial County and the Coachella and Palo Verde Valley of Riverside County
2. High Desert--Desert areas of Los Angeles, San Bernardino Inyo, and Mono Counties.
3. Central and Southern Coastal Plains and Valleys--Coastal valleys from Monterey to San Diego Counties.
4. San Joaquin Valley--Valley areas of Kern, Tulare, Kings, Fresno, Madera, Merced, Stanislaus, and San Joaquin Counties.
5. Sacramento Valley--Valley areas of Solano, Yolo, Colusa, and Glenn Counties.
6. Northern Mountain Valleys--Siskiyou, Modoc, Lassen, Shasta, Plumas, and Sierra Counties.
7. North Coast--Areas of Mendocino and Humboldt Counties

For this discussion the North Coast area has been combined with the Northern Mountain Valleys.

The purpose of this opening session is to provide the audience with a brief overview of the various cultural practices and specific grower concerns from each of these major production areas. Hopefully, this background will give the Symposium attendants a better appreciation of what their fellow alfalfa producers experience within the diverse production areas of California.

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