

PRODUCTION AND PROCESSING LABOR COSTS

It is a known fact that California Agriculture has, for a number of years, been forced to pay higher wages than other states and considerably more than our foreign competitors. Wages for field labor in the California Fig Industry have increased from 20 cents per hour in 1930 to a minimum of \$1.30 per hour in 1966. To further add to the burden placed upon California Agriculture, the Industrial Welfare Commission of California ordered that the minimum wage for women to be increased, effective February 1, to \$1.65 per hour and to \$1.35 per hour for minors. Although Wage Order 14-68, "Wages and Working Conditions for Women and Minors in Agricultural Occupations", refers to only women and minors, Fair Employment and other laws call for equal pay for equal work, making any discrimination against men illegal. It is thus apparent that \$1.65 per hour will be the general minimum wage this year in California Agriculture. These farm wages are far above those defined in the Federal Wage Law, which calls for a minimum rate of pay of \$1.15 per hour.

In an effort to keep labor costs at a minimum, many California Fig Growers are turning to mechanization wherever possible. Unfortunately, this is not the solution to all labor problems since the only cultural procedure than can be mechanized, to any extent, is harvesting. Even mechanical harvesting has certain draw-backs; namely, substantial investments for harvesting and soil preparation equipment.

Additional costs of proper pruning, soil preparation, etc., nullify any labor savings in harvest. Mechanical harvesting is mainly a method of reducing peak labor demands and provides possible security against a complete lack of labor supply.

Using information reported by the Foreign Competition Branch of the Foreign Agricultural Service, Table 4 points out that field labor rates in California in 1967 were 6 times greater for men and 11 times greater for women than comparable wages in Portugal—the largest supplier of foreign fig paste to the United States. In 1968, due to the previously mentioned wage increase, per hour labor in California will be 7 to 14 times greater.

TABLE 4.—COMPARISON OF AGRICULTURAL WAGE RATES IN FIG PRODUCING COUNTRIES OF THE WORLD

Country	Rural labor		Processing plant labor	
	Per hour wage rates men	Per hour wage rates women	Per hour wage rates men	Per hour wage rates women
Portugal.....	\$0.23	\$0.12	(²)	(²)
Spain.....	.23	(²)	\$0.26	\$0.21
Greece.....	.37	.31	(²)	(²)
Turkey.....	.20	.20	.25	.25
California.....	1.35	1.35	2.42-2.87	2.24

¹ The information for Portugal, Spain, and Greece is as of mid 1967. For Turkey, 1964.

² Not available.

³ Minimum 1967 wage rates, effective Feb. 1, 1968, \$1.65 per hour.

⁴ Does not include State and Federal taxes, pension payments and group medical payments made by employer. These equal approximately 55 cents per hour.

Reference: Foreign Competition Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Division, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Foreign Agricultural Service.