



Imperial Irrigation District

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About Imperial and Coachella Valleys

Description of the Area

Imperial County is located in the southeast corner of California. It is bordered on the north by Riverside County, on the west by San Diego County, on the south by Mexico and on the east by the Colorado River which forms a boundary between California and Arizona. It is the 9th largest County in California and covers an area of 4,284 square miles.

The County has an average annual rainfall of less than three inches and three-fourth of the area is desert sand and rugged mountains. Even so, Imperial County is one of the State's major agricultural producers. Farming is done in the Imperial Valley on a one thousand square mile area that extends from the Mexican border north to the Salton Sea. An extensive irrigation system has been developed and adequate water is supplied from the Colorado River through the All-American Canal. There is a year round growing season with a mean monthly temperature ranging from 55 to 90 degrees.

The Colorado River offers a wide variety of recreational activities. The Salton Sea which is known for its fishing and water activities, was created when the Colorado River changes its course and followed the irrigation canal flooding the lowest part of the valley.

The City of El Centro, the largest of the three major cities in the Imperial Valley, is the county seat and principal trading center of the County. It is accessible via interstate Highway 8 crossing east and west near the Mexican border and State Highways 86 and 111 from the north, which continue to the Mexican border.

Natural Resources

Geothermal exploration is being carried on in Imperial County primarily in the unincorporated areas of Heber and Niland. There are currently 15 geothermal plants employing approximately 600 employees. A 30 megawatt geothermal plant has been approved for construction in the Heber area that is expected to generate \$433,000 revenue for Imperial County. Gold mining in the Glamis area and Cargo Muchacho Mountains east of the City of Brawley as well as a gypsum mine in the Ocotillo area are natural resources that are important to Imperial County's economy.

Population and Labor Force

The population of Imperial County was 135,000 in January 1994, according to the State Department of Finance. This represents an increase of 6,400 persons of 4.9 percent according to the 1990 Federal Census Bureau.

Non-farm salary employment rose to 33,500 an increase of 6.3 percent over the 1992 total which is mainly due to the expansion of the large state prison in Calipatria and the opening of a second prison in Seeley. Although unemployment rates were not quite as high as in 1992, the yearly average still reached 27.2 percent and the rates for July, August, September and October were again over 30 percent.

Imperial County's wage and salary employment is expected to show a slight growth through the rest of 1997 and 1998 led again by the government sector. The North America Free Trade Agreement is expected to lead to increase trade across the border and in the long run, more jobs, especially in transportation and manufacturing, at border cities in Imperial County.

Incorporated Cities

Imperial County has seven incorporated cities - Brawley, Calexico, Calipatria, El Centro, Holtville, Imperial and Westmorland. All lie within the central agricultural area and contain approximately 71 percent of the total County Population.

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