

## Economics

The Salton Sea region with its searing desert temperatures and icy mountain summits has been the setting for many legends of riches lost and found, and the rise and fall of industries and government facilities including salt mining and the U.S. Navy Test Base. Prospectors scanned the desert for the sunken pearl ship of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish armada and John "Pegleg" Smith's bounty of gold nuggets. However, the true economic fortune of the area has been realized by the hard work of men and women known as farmers—today agriculture is a multi-million dollar industry in the Imperial and Coachella valleys surrounding the Salton Sea.

(picture of weekend prospectors)

It's no wonder that agriculture found a niche in this land made fertile by the periodic prehistoric flooding of the Colorado River which formed and reformed Lake Cahuilla. An 1863 survey team noted local Cahuilla Indians were raising corn, barley, and vegetables using ditch irrigation to bring water to the fertile but arid region. Yet the area could not realize its agriculture potential without a reliable source of water – water that is now harnessed from the Colorado River. (The Salton Sea, California's Overlooked Treasure, Pat Laflin).

The Colorado River is the source of irrigation that brings life to this desert region. The 80-mile long All-American Canal delivers water to the southeast corner of the Imperial Valley. Roughly 2.8 million acre-feet of water are used per year to grow the crops and livestock to help feed the nation. Irrigation water is delivered via 16,000 miles of canals managed by the local water-company, the Imperial Irrigation District. Most of the water is delivered by gravity, as the Salton Basin's elevation is lower than that of the Colorado River and American Canal. Current water price is

\$14.56 per acre-foot (326,000 gallons) delivered to the farmer's headgate.

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Farmland consists of very fertile, alluvial deposits derived from the Colorado River flood plain. Well-drain loams and silty loams are the preferred soil types. Since the area was developed near the turn of the century by water, and land companies, the fields were marked off in sections (1 mile x 1 mile). Parcels were subdivided into smaller and smaller units with 40 acres normally being the smallest farmable size. The average price of farmland is \$2,000-\$5,000 per acre depending upon land quality. Factors governing price of land include soil type, drainage, location, cement ditches, access to paved roads, underground drain systems.