

MONTEREY COUNTY

agriculture



Valley's ag history a story of innovation

From wheat to potatoes to lettuce, growers have made Monterey County a land of abundance

From wasteland to wheat, from potatoes to beans, lettuce to winegrapes, the Salinas Valley has evolved into a dozen different guises over the past 150 years to feed a hungry world with trade tentacles from Europe to the Far East and wherever someone craves a nice salad and a glass of wine.

The first Europeans to see the land were explorers, soldiers and priests, not farmers. They saw a desolate landscape, a kind of cool

desert, bisected by an indifferent stream. In the mid-1870s, Charles King turned the wind-blown plain into the finest patch of wheat on the West Coast. In 1893, agronomist Luther Burbank developed a variety of russet potato that had an affinity for Salinas soil. The humble spud thus became the Valley's premier product.

All along, people had been growing green things such as lettuce for local distribution. Its short shelf life made it impossible

to ship long distances. The early 1920s, however, brought the advent of the refrigerated rail car. By 1923, the Salinas Valley could not only grow hundreds of acres of lettuce but could also ship it across the country.

Once a curiosity crop, winegrapes now are quickly becoming part of the Salinas Valley's agricultural signature, producing critically acclaimed wines of all varieties. What's next? Wait and see.

— Jim Albanese