

# California's Forgotten Farmers

Spring 2021

A 100-Mile Circle Fighting to Preserve  
America's Food Independence



*If the point of a compass was centered on Fresno, California, and a 100-mile radius was drawn, the circle formed would reach across the most vital and productive growing region in the world. Although this 100 Mile Circle covers less than 1% of the total land mass of the U.S., it produces nearly one-half of its fresh fruits, vegetables and nuts – more than 250 different crops rich in the vitamins and nutrients essential to human survival.*

Yet, this incredible resource is in serious jeopardy, though not from drought or climate change as one might expect. On the contrary, the region's farmers are some of the most innovative in the world, continuing to improve the way they grow food, from creating new heat-tolerant varieties to incorporating precision irrigation and moisture sensing technology. No, the biggest threat to the 100 Mile Circle is indifference which has led to insufficient infrastructure spending, onerous regulations and an overall lack of understanding the critical role food production plays in our nation's security and global economic position.

While the COVID-19 induced quarantines brought much needed attention to the importance of a safe and reliable food supply, the pandemic also revealed how easily the supply chain can be broken and the urgent need to address these issues before the next disruptive event.

## Preserving Our Food Security

The 100 Mile Circle is home to a Mediterranean climate and the world's largest supply of Class 1 soil – a type of soil capable of growing nearly any crop. This small region, perfected by nature, easily surpasses all other U.S. locations in food production per square mile. Sixty percent of the country's fruits and nuts, and more than 30% of its vegetables, are grown in the 100 Mile Circle.

Although most of the region's produce is consumed domestically, the 100 Mile Circle exports more than \$14 billion in agricultural products every year.

*Its soil and climate are so ideal for growing fruits and vegetables that if the region was designated as a country, it would be the 11th largest producer of non-cereal grain crops in the world. <sup>(1)</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> "FAO Value of Agricultural Production," Knoema (Numbers are for crop production without livestock or animal products. Cereal grains include corn, rice, soybeans and wheat.), accessed May 5, 2020.

# Why is protecting the 100 Mile Circle so important?

For three primary reasons:

- 1 *Agriculture is the only U.S. sector that has posted a trade surplus for well over 50 years.* <sup>(2)</sup>
- 2 *As diets evolve and the global population continues to expand, our position as the world's largest food exporter will play an increasingly significant role in the global economy.*
- 3 *Maintaining food independence is more than just providing a healthy, transparent food supply. It is also a matter of national security.*

In fact, keeping the U.S. food supply safe is so critical to the country's national security and well-being that it is governed by the Department of Homeland Security.

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2 Daigle, Brian, "U.S. Trade by Industry Sector and Selected Trading Partners," United States International Trade Commission, accessed April 15, 2020.

*We believe there is no other region in the world, other than perhaps those rich in oil reserves, with the same strategic and economic value to the U.S. as the 100 Mile Circle.*

– Bill Harrison, Managing Partner, Harrison Co.

However, there are Californians who believe large-scale agriculture is detrimental to the state for environmental reasons, preferring to outsource food production to other countries. This position is not only harmful to the economic vitality of the 100 Mile Circle, but it also places the long-term security of the country's food supply at risk.

## The purpose of this report is twofold:

**FIRST** to highlight the critical role this forgotten region plays in the country's food supply.

**SECOND** to challenge U.S. legislators to implement the changes necessary to preserve America's food independence.



# Impact of Legislative Indifference

Despite the state's dominance as a global leader in ag production, 95% of Californians live in urban areas, including many who have relocated from outside the state. Most are unaware of how critical the 100 Mile Circle is to the food-supply chain. It seems that the only Apple many Californians care about is the one growing in Silicon Valley.

The result is a state legislature overwhelmingly influenced by an urban majority that benefits from easy access to an abundance of fresh foods, and yet is detached from, and largely unaware of, the labor and resources required to grow the fruits, vegetables and proteins that stock our grocery shelves.

Until the COVID-19 pandemic, most Californians – and most Americans – probably never imagined shuttered restaurants and depleted supermarkets. Even now, it is highly unlikely that consumers fully appreciate the sacrifices made by farmers and essential workers who continued to grow and harvest their crops while the rest of the country sheltered in place.

*What has become abundantly clear is that a political, economic and societal infrastructure that lacks the necessary perspective into farmers' livelihood has led to a failure to completely understand the contributions they make and the importance of addressing the challenges they face every day.*

To ensure a resilient food supply, California must solve two of the biggest threats to the 100 Mile Circle: **The state's water problems and complying with a mounting list of regulatory requirements.**





## Water Infrastructure

The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), passed in 2014, places the burden on local farmers and other stakeholders to develop plans to reverse the effects that periodic drought coupled with continued growth has had on California's underground water basins.

Although farmers are implementing solutions to reduce demand through more efficient water use, research data clearly shows that without also increasing supply, water balance will never be achieved. When excess water is available, California is missing the opportunity to capture and store it simply because the water infrastructure system is broken.

## Regulatory Overreach

Americans enjoy an abundant, diverse and overall affordable food supply, and regulations have no doubt made it one of the world's safest.<sup>(3)</sup>

However, regulations that are unnecessary, impractical and, in many cases, overreaching can be so disruptive that the ultimate outcome is a food supply that is less safe and less transparent.

Unlike other business owners who have fled California in recent years due to over-regulation, farmers do not have the option of moving their farmland to a more business-friendly state. Climate and soil conditions are exclusive to California's natural environment and simply cannot be replaced or replicated in other states. However, large producers of specialty crops are increasingly setting their sights beyond California and toward Central and South America.

In those regions, land, labor, water and regulatory costs are all far less expensive and less restrictive. Such an exodus would result in the U.S. regressing from being the world's most abundant food basket to a country dependent on imports to feed its population.

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<sup>3</sup> "Fast Facts About Agriculture and Food," American Farm Bureau Federation, accessed April 22, 2020.

# Time to Act

At a time of unprecedented change, one certainty holds firm and true – our nation’s most valuable natural resource must be preserved.

With the global population growing and demand for nutrient-rich, high-calorie diets accelerating, the world will need to double the amount of food it produces by 2050, while using less of everything – land, water and chemicals. Accomplishing a task this daunting requires near-constant innovation as well as capital to implement new ideas. It will also call for a widespread commitment to preserving the earth’s natural resources, and advocating for and protecting those who tend to them every day.

Fortunately, 100 Mile Circle farmers remain incredibly productive despite ongoing challenges. Years of experience overcoming all types of adversity, from weather and pests to volatile political climates, have conditioned generations of farmers to continually adapt to changing and often uncertain circumstances.

As a result, farming operations in the 100 Mile Circle continue to generate positive returns for innovative growers, and for the time being, the region’s fertile cropland remains among the most valuable and sought-after in the world.

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# About Harrison Co.



*We are an unapologetic advocate for family-owned businesses. We combine intense focus in the consumer industry with a consultative, data-driven approach, to provide private business owners with the advantage they need to make the best possible strategic, M&A, and financing decisions*

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