

Red Rock Valley Area In Strawberry Business Now

By J. O. McKINNEY
In Red Rock Valley, 10 miles east of Macdoel, 100 acres of strawberry plants are growing. These plants produce no fruit. Blooms are all removed, and the plants expend all their energy developing more plants, as plant-bearing runners criss-cross the field.

About mid-October the harvest of strawberry plants will begin. During the next 30 days a million plants a day will be harvested to supply foundation stock for straw-

berry producers. There never seems to be an end to strawberry plant demand, as they must be replaced every third year.

This 100-acre tract is one of the nursery farms owned by Jack Wheeler, of Los Molinos. He is probably the largest producer of these plants in the world, as the Red Rock plot is not half of his acreage.

Growing in a region of a scant nine inches of precipitation, water must be supplied in terrific quan-

ties to 30 million thirsty plants. This comes from an underground lake. Two electrically-driven pumps, each capable of delivering 3,000 gallons of water per minute, and two booster pumps force water through overhead irrigation equipment to every part of the tract.

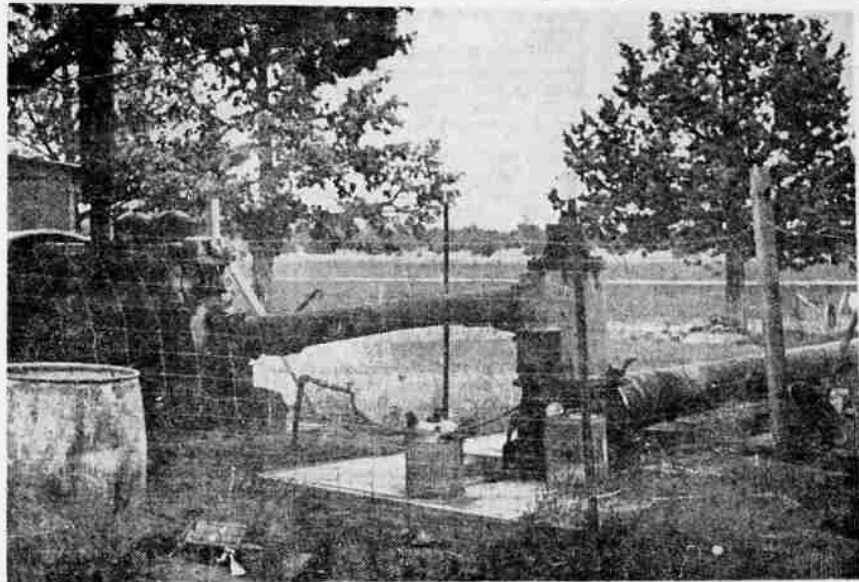
The mystery of such an underground lake in a region of little precipitation is easily understood when one learns that not five miles away is Antelope Sink, where one

of the larger streams flowing from Mt. Shasta strikes a lava fault and disappears into the earth. That water is not lost. It apparently creates the underground lake which now supplies the ranchers of the valley.

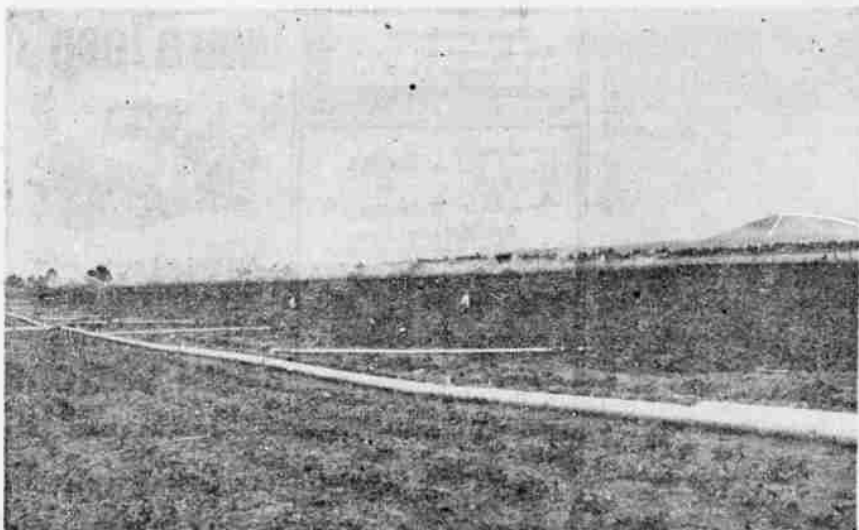
Harvesting the millions of plants that grow on 100 acres is a problem. Three hundred laborers are required to dig a million plants per day, and that sort of a payroll cuts into profits. Wheeler solved that problem by developing, and patenting a mechanical digger that will dig a million plants in a day with but four men handling it.

The altitude of Red Rock Valley, about 4,200 feet, retards the maturing season of the plants. But it accelerates the freezing weather in the fall. When the harvest begins in October it must be pushed to completion before the ground freezes. This is both a handicap and a blessing. Production per acre is smaller than at lower altitudes, and longer growing season, but the plants are more hardy, and productive when they begin to bear fruit.

Beside the acreage in Red Rock, a large acreage of strawberry plants are grown each year near Tulelake. The combined acreage makes Klamath Basin probably the largest strawberry plant producing area in the entire world. Stock produced in that altitude and in the fertile soil produce more and better berries than from other parts of the country.



THIS BIG PUMP will kick out 3,000 gallons per minute to irrigate the strawberries in the huge field. — Photo by McKinney



IT'S A BIG CHORE to keep water going on the 100 acres of strawberries on this plot in the Red Rock Valley. This shot shows part of the sprinkler system used in the process. — Photo by McKinney



A STRAWBERRY PLANT DIGGER capable of handling a million plants per day is used in the operation on the Jack Wheeler place in Red Rock Valley. —Photo by McKinney

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