

# Field Croplands

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## **VEGETATION ASSOCIATION:**

FIELD CROPLANDS

## **MAPPED SUBASSOCIATIONS:**

None

## **BIOGEOGRAPHY**

Field croplands occur in nearly all human-inhabited areas in the world today, although, historically, the indigenous peoples of Western Riverside County were not known to grow crops.

## **RANGE AND DISTRIBUTION WITHIN WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY**

Field croplands are mapped extensively throughout the Plan Area. The largest areas are: around SR-371 in the vicinity of Anza; in an east-west strip from Murrieta Hot Springs; through French Valley; Antelope Valley; Paloma Valley; Menifee Valley; Winchester; Domenigoni Valley; to West Hemet; and the Diamond Valley area; and in Eastvale. More medium-sized tracts of croplands are mapped around SR-79 in the Radee Valley east of Vail Lake, in Wolf Valley and Pauba Valley, around Murrieta north of Temecula, in Tres Cerritos in the San Jacinto Valley, around the communities of Lakeview, Nuevo, Romoland and Perris, in Mockingbird Canyon and Mead Valley, and in the area of Beaumont and Banning Bench. Small and scattered occurrences are in the Terwilliger and Cahuilla Valleys, along Wilson Creek in the Lewis Valley from the community of Sage up to Black Mountain, on the Santa Rosa Plateau, east of the Gavilan Hills, along I-15 through Alberhill and Corona in the foothills of the Santa Ana mountains, south of SR-91 in the City of Riverside, along the Santa Ana River in the communities of Mira Loma, Glen Avon and Jurupa, and along San Timoteo Canyon.

## **VEGETATION CHARACTERISTICS**

Crop vegetation varies widely from ten-foot tall corn to two-inch tall strawberries (Zeiner 1988). Some crops are planted in rows, whereas others form dense stands (Zeiner 1988). Some croplands support annual plants which can be rotated, whereas others are long-term monocultures (Zeiner 1988). The leading crops in Riverside County are dates, hay, and bell peppers (CDFA 1999). According to 1992 statistics, 6200 acres of barley, 600 acres of dried beans, 1000 acres of corn, 12100 acres of cotton, 7400 acres of oats and 29,000 acres of wheat were planted in Riverside County (CASS 1993a). The Perris-Hemet area is noted for its production of cantaloupes, other melons, carrots, onions and potatoes (CDFA 1988). In 1987 12,300 acres of lettuce, 700 acres of onions, 4600 acres of potatoes, 5060 acres of asparagus, 1700 acres of broccoli, 5300 acres of cantaloupe, 2,000 acres of carrots, 800 acres



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of cauliflower, 100 acres of celery and 4,800 acres of sweet corn were planted in Riverside County (CDFA 1988).

### PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Crop rotations of a five to seven-year period are common and switch between annual and perennial species (Zeiner 1988). This method serves to enhance soil productivity by retaining nutrients (Zeiner 1988). Common cultivation techniques used on croplands act to repeatedly disturb the soil (Holland and Keil 1995).

### ECOSYSTEM PROCESSES

Many annual crop species are self-fertile or set seeds apomictically (Holland and Keil 1995). Seeds are also disseminated by machinery and some species may have seeds which can lay dormant in a seed bank (Holland and Keil 1995). Some weedy species common to croplands exclude growth of nearby plants; *e.g.*, wild oat (*Avena fatua*) produces allelopathic chemicals and sow-thistles (*Sonchus* spp.) develop a basal rosette which shades out other seedling plants (Holland and Keil 1995). For these reasons, within a few years of converting a natural Habitat area to cropland, native plants are effectively eliminated (Holland and Keil 1995). Native perennials are especially susceptible to disturbance (Holland and Keil 1995). Abandoned crop lands seldom re-establish dense native plant communities and often native species are absent (Holland and Keil 1995).

### THREATS

No threats to crop production have been identified in the literature review for this account. It can be stated that the main threat to crop production is economic competition for land.

### LITERATURE CITED

California Agricultural Statistics Service. 1993a. California Field Crop Statistics 1983-1992. County Data 1991-92. Sacramento, California.

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Zeiner, David C. 1988. Cropland. *In* A Guide to Wildlife Habitats of California. ed. Kenneth E. Mayer and William F. Laudenslayer, Jr. California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, Sacramento, California. 138-139.

