

Agriculture in the San Ramon Valley

FOCUS:

Why was agriculture important to the San Ramon Valley?

MAIN IDEA:

Use the information provided to learn about the agriculture in the San Ramon Valley.

VOCABULARY:

cash crop
transportation
plows
liveries
butter churn

scythe
thresh
flail
hulled
creameries



Student Pages

When you drive around the San Ramon Valley what do you see? I bet you said houses and stores and streets and schools, and on and on. There is a lot to see, but if I took you back in time to the year 1850 you would see none of what you see now. Your great, great grandparents were possibly children then.

If you had been driving around the San Ramon Valley in 1850 in your horse and buggy, you would have seen acres and acres of wheat fields. The San Ramon Valley was filled with ranches and farms. Wheat was the major **cash crop** between 1850 and 1900. Farmers put their sacks of wheat on wagons and took a long dusty ride to Pacheco and Martinez where it was loaded on ships and sent to England. For their own use, farmers had wheat ground into flour at the Pacheco Flour Mill.

Cash crop – A crop that can be sold for money.

Hay was another crop that was important to the San Ramon Valley. This was an important crop because horses eat hay and horses were the most important form of **transportation** between 1850 and 1900. Horses also pulled wagons and **plows**. Hay was also a **cash crop**. Farmers sold their hay to San Francisco where it was fed to horses at **liveries**. Farmers used some of their hay for their own horses.



Plow - A farm tool used to cut, turn up, and break up the soil.

Transportation - The way we get from one place to another.

Livery – A place where horses and carriages can be hired for transportation.

How did farmers do all of the work back in 1850? They did a lot of the work by hand. Farmers cut the wheat with a **scythe** and **threshed** with a **flail**. Teams of as many as 20 horses powered most farm machinery until about 1915. How do you think farmers do work today?

Scythe – A tool with a long, single edged blade used to cut grain.

Thresh – To beat out the grain from the husk.

Flail – A stick tied to the end of another stick used to **thresh** wheat.

What would your life have been like if you had lived on a farm in 1860? Would you have traveled to school? Yes, you would. You might have ridden a horse to school or have gone in a wagon. You might have walked a couple of miles to school. How do you get to school now?

Your school probably would have been a one room school with all grades in one room. Imagine your school mate being as much as three years older than you sitting next to you. How would that feel?

Do you do chores at home? What are your chores? If you had been living in 1860, you would have had a lot of chores. There were lots of animals on a farm and you might have helped your family by caring for the animals. You might have fed the chickens and gathered eggs for your breakfast. You might have brought hay for the horses. You might have weeded your mother's vegetable garden and picked vegetables for dinner. You might have helped your mother with the **butter churn** making butter for the family meals. You might have carried wood in so your mother could cook the dinner. There was a lot of work to do. What do you think you would have liked doing?



Butter churn - A container where cream is mixed until it turns into butter.

How do you have fun? What do you like to do? Back in 1860, things were a lot different. People did not live close to each other, so boys and girls back then did not have close neighbors to play with. There was a lot to do on the farm and everyone in the family was expected to help, so there wasn't a lot of time to play. Families were bigger than they are today, so boys and girls usually played with their brothers and sisters. There were no televisions, no computers, no radios and there were no electric lights.

People used candles and lamps for light. What would you have done without all of these inventions? How would you have entertained yourself?

What is your room like? Do you share a room? What furniture do you have in your room? Back in 1860 boys would probably share a room with a couple of brothers. They might have even shared a bed. Girls would share a room with their sisters. It would be rare for children to have their own rooms. There was very little furniture. There were very few clothes and usually children just hung up their clothes on hooks on the wall. Children had very few toys, and usually the few things they had would have been kept in a box under the bed. What would it be like to share a room with two other people?

By 1890, farming had changed in the San Ramon Valley. Prices for wheat had dropped, so farmers planted other crops. In 1891, trains came to the San Ramon Valley which meant that farmers could ship their crops to distant markets. Farmers planted nuts and fruits in our valley. By 1920, the valley was covered with orchards. There were hundreds of acres of English walnuts. Many of these old walnut trees still exist in our valley. Fruits such as pears, cherries and wine grapes were also grown. There were vast fields of tomatoes. Prunes were dried, but other fruits were sent to canneries in Walnut Creek. Bartlett pears were sent to eastern states, and people all the way across the country loved our delicious pears.

Even in 1930, a lot was done by hand. To pick walnuts someone had to shake the tree with a long pole, then someone had to pick up the walnuts



and put them in a five gallon bucket. People were paid for the number of buckets they could fill with nuts. In later years mechanical devices were used to shake the trees; then the nuts were picked up off the ground. Fruit was also picked by hand. There was a lot of hard

work back in 1930. How many buckets of walnuts could you have picked?

Walnuts were harvested when the husk covering the nut cracked open. After the walnuts were harvested they were **hulled**, which means the nut was taken out of the husk. This was done by a large electrically powered wire bush and a stream of water that tore the hulls off. After the husks were removed, the nuts had to be dried. The nuts were then placed in sacks and sold.

Many farmers kept a few cows. They milked the cows for butter and milk, and they sold the cream to **creameries**. There was a **creamery** in the valley until 1967.

Creameries – A place where milk is processed and cheese and butter are made.

Gail Kameron, 2004

Questions to Think About

1. Why isn't there a creamery in the valley now?
2. Why don't we have many farms in the San Ramon Valley today?
3. What is a cannery?
4. What do farmers have to do to get their fields ready for planting? How did they do this in 1850? In 2004?
5. How did they milk cows in 1850? In 2004?
6. Why did farmers in the valley stop growing wheat?
7. Why was hay such an important crop in 1850?
8. If you had been a farmer in the San Ramon Valley what would you have grown on your farm?
9. What are you doing when you thresh the wheat?
10. Is wheat important to you? Do you eat it? What do people do with wheat?
11. Do horses still eat hay?
12. Name the steps in getting nuts ready to sell.

Teacher Pages

Student Activities:

How important is wheat today? Go into your kitchen and find all the foods that are made out of wheat. Make a list. Is wheat important today? Bring the list to school to share.

Class activity: Make butter.

Comparing Generations (See activity pages)

Students could complete a mural on agriculture in the San Ramon Valley. This could be a class project or small groups of students could work on a mural. A class mural could be added to other murals on the history of the San Ramon Valley and displayed at open house. Murals created by a small group of students could be made into large picture books with writing. These could be displayed at open house and shared with buddy classes as well.

Field trips (See special section on field trips.)

- **Family field trips** Go to Forest Home Farms Historic Park during one of the open houses or activities publicized in the newspapers.
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- **Passport Opportunity:**
Forest Home Farms Historic Park: Class trip would allow a chance to try canning.

Speaker: This would be a good time to have an older citizen come in and talk about some of the above topics.

History/ Social Science Standards:

- Knows how to identify change and continuity in his or her own life.
- Identifies similarities and differences between the past and present.
- Summarizes key events and explains the historical context
- Identifies and interprets the multiple causes and effects of events
- Makes personal connections to current events in light of historical events
- Applies a variety of writing types to historical events

Reading and Social Studies

Communities, Harcourt Brace, pages 220-225

Communities, Activity Book, Page 42

Teacher Notes

- Make arrangements for a trip to Forest Home Farms Historic Park, 973-2536.
- Make arrangements to have an older person come in to do one of the “Comparing Generations”
- Use the text provided to enter into discussions about farming in the past and farming now.

Additional Resources

Activity pages

Comparing Generations – chores, bedroom, clothes, entertainment (parent and student pages)

Essays

Agriculture, For a Century the Business of the Valley
Danville Grange No. 85

Websites

- www.cdfa.gov/kids/ page
- www.csrnf.org/doc
- www.nationalgrange.org
- www.grage.org

Search

Agriculture History California

Books

- J630 – SUBJECT LOCATION FOR FARMING
- J 630.973 *Farming* by Ann Love and Jane Drake
- J 630.97309 *Early Farm Life* by Lise Gunby
- J 630.973 *The American Farm* by Joan Anderson
- J630.203 *Farmers* by Dee Ready
- J630.9 *Farmer Through History* by Peter Chrisp
- W *Farmer Boy* by Laura Ingalls Wilder

AGRICULTURE

For a Century the Business of the Valley

Agriculture has long played an important role in San Ramon Valley history. Before the Spanish came in 1769, native people made use of diverse natural resources. After Mission San Jose was founded in 1797, the Valley became mission land and herds of cattle and sheep from the mission and Mexican ranchos were grazed locally. Hides and tallow were exported in exchange for manufactured goods. With the Gold Rush and statehood, prospectors and new settlers arrived to find fertile land, mild weather and a surprising pattern of rainfall.

From the 1850s to the 1950s several factors affected the Valley's agricultural profile: technology (new inventions), power (horse, steam and gasoline), changing markets, business support and, of course, weather.

Wheat was the major cash crop from the 1850s to 1900. Sailing ships from England brought goods to sell and returned with their holds filled with the Valley's hard dry wheat. It brought premium prices at the Liverpool Corn Exchange. Farmers hauled their sacked wheat on freight wagons to wharves in Pacheco and Martinez where it was loaded onto ships. For their own use farmers had wheat ground into flour at the Pacheco Flour Mill, a long day's drive on very dusty roads. When the Danville Branch of the Southern Pacific came to the Valley in 1891, this long haul was eliminated.

Hay, from volunteer grasses or planted grain, was of almost equal importance to wheat. San Francisco was the major market for hay because of its liveries, the Cavalry at the Presidio and the many draft horses which supported docks and commerce. Scows, loaded with locally grown hay, plied the bay from docks in Pacheco and Martinez to the special hay wharf in San Francisco.

Cattle and sheep, grazing the hills surrounding the Valley, provided another source of agricultural income. Several breeders raised purebred livestock, sold throughout California. Many farmers milked a few cows for butter and for cream to sell to local creameries for year-round income. There was a

Grade A dairy in the Valley until 1967. Hogs were raised for meat since hams and bacon kept better than other meat without refrigeration.

World wheat prices fell in the 1890s and local yields declined about the same time because of continuous cropping. Farmers diversified by planting fruit and nut trees, with the result that by 1920 the Valley floor was nearly covered with orchards.

In 1873, Myron Ward Hall of Alamo grafted a Persian walnut (also known as English walnut) onto a native black walnut tree, producing an easily cracked, flavorful nut. Scions from that tree were used for the earliest walnut orchards. Hundreds of acres of these English walnuts were planted by the early 1920s and new orchards were still being planted after World War II. Growers established the Contra Costa Walnut Growers Association in Walnut Creek which graded, packaged and sold most of the County's production. Travis Boone of Forest Home Farms and others provided harvesting, hulling and drying services into the 1960s.

Fruit production also increased as prunes, pears, cherries and grapes were grown. Pears were planted on the Bishop Ranch in 1911. The ranch's Bartletts were shipped directly from its railroad siding and became a well-known trademark in eastern markets. Prunes, dried in the summer sun, kept well but other fruits were sent to canneries in Walnut Creek and Hayward. Tomatoes, grown without irrigation, were sold to local canneries, including one in Walnut Creek.

The industrial revolution changed farming methods considerably during the century. In the early 1850s wheat was harvested by hand with a scythe and threshed with a flail. The grain was separated from the chaff by tossing it into the wind. From the mid 1850s, reapers and headers were used to cut grain. It was then hauled to a stationary threshing machine which separated the kernels from straw and chaff. In the 1930s, combines—machines which moved through fields cutting and threshing at the same time—were developed. Farmers in this region were slow to convert to bulk grain handling and continued to use jute sacks into the 1950s.

Teams of as many as 20 workhorses powered most farm machinery until about 1915, although some steam engines were used to run threshing

machines from the late 1800s. Gasoline-powered tractors began to take over much of the heavy flat land work in the teen years. Tractors capable of working hillsides arrived in the '30s. Horses were used for light jobs, such as hay work, through World War II.

Valley towns developed along with farms since farmers needed the special services of blacksmiths, wheelwrights and harness-makers. Blacksmiths were among the first businesses located in Alamo, Danville and San Ramon. They made and repaired farm equipment, shod horses, sharpened plows and did a variety of other jobs. Each town also had a general store with a post office. There too were livery stables and hotels, which made it possible for salesmen to arrive by stagecoach or train, rent rigs and visit farms. The Grange, churches, schools and fire stations provided meeting places. Gasoline stations sold and serviced cars and trucks.

During the century from the 1850s to the 1950s the San Ramon Valley was part of the rural edge of the San Francisco Bay Area. Farmers and ranchers focused on agricultural production while local businesses supported them. The Valley provided a cornucopia of products, meriting the label "Garden of Eden" used by early pioneer Robert Baldwin.

Ralph Cozine

~~ Brochure text, written to accompany the exhibit "Agriculture, For a Century the Business of the Valley", 2002 at the Museum of the San Ramon Valley ~~

Danville Grange Number 85 Patrons of Husbandry

The Danville Grange No. 85 began in 1873. It was part of a nation-wide movement which promoted the welfare of farm families in every possible way. The Grange was the social, economic, intellectual and political heart of the San Ramon Valley in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Both men and women could belong as equal members.

The Grange promoted modern farming practices, worked to improve farmer income by eliminating the middle man, combated high railroad rates through political activities and provided an opportunity for fellowship. A State Grangers' Bank and a County Grangers' Warehousing and Business Association were organized to meet their needs.

In 1874 valley members built a Grange Hall on Front Street in Danville which became the focal point for meetings, lectures, dinners and dances for the entire area. Huge harvest feasts were held in the park surrounding the Grange, drawing guests from miles away. Grangers helped establish the railroad in 1891, founded the first library and public high school, began a County Good Roads League and initiated the effort to make Mount Diablo a State Park.

Today most residents know about the Grange because of the Danville Grange No. 85 building on Diablo Road in Danville which is reserved by community groups and classes. The Grange continues but with many fewer members since agriculture is no longer the main business of the Valley. The Danville Grange is the only remaining active Grange in the entire County.

~~ From Museum of the San Ramon Valley, exhibit, 2004

Comparing Generations – My Bedroom

Student Name _____ Date _____

We have been talking about boys and girls who lived in our valley a long time ago. These boys and girls lived on farms and their houses probably looked a lot different than your house. Let's think about your bedroom and how different it probably was from bedrooms a long time ago.

Do you share a room?

Do you have a television in your room?

Do you have a computer in your room?

Do you have a desk in your room?

What special toys do you have in your room?

What other pieces of furniture do you have in your room?

What do you like about your room?

Draw a picture of your room.

Comparing Generations --My Bedroom

Dear Parents,

As part of our local history project we are studying the history of agriculture on our valley. In class we talked about the kind of bedroom a child might have in 1850. Then we talked about our bedrooms, and we drew pictures to show what our bedrooms looked like. During the coming week we would like you to talk to your child about your bedroom and what it looked like when you were in third grade. It would be great if your child could interview a grandparent or an older person about the same subject.

1. Did you share a room?
2. Did you have a television in your room?
3. Did you have a computer in your room?
4. Did you have a desk in your room?
5. What special toys did you have in your room?
6. What did you like about your room?
7. What other pieces of furniture did you have in your room?

Comparing Generations – Chores

Student Name _____

Date _____

Interview your parents and ask them about their chores when they were your age. Make a list of their chores. Interview a grandparent, or an older person about what they did to help their families. Bring your lists to school to share. (Lists can be turned into paragraphs or students could make illustrated books to compare the generations.)

What do you do to help around the house?

Make a list of your chores.

How would your chores be different from a third grader 100 years ago?

Comparing Generations – Chores

Dear Parents,

As part of our local history project we are studying the history of agriculture. During this study we are talking about what life was like for children in and around 1850. We have discussed what children in third grade did to help their parents in those days remembering that a lot of the children who lived in the San Ramon Valley lived on farms and ranches. In the classroom students have made a list of the chores that they do at home to help in your house. During the coming week please talk with your child about the chores that you did as a child. If possible have your child speak to a grandparent or an older person about the same topic.

1. How did you help with the family pets when you were in third grade?
2. Did you help your mother with meals for your family?
3. Did you help with yard work? If not, why not?
4. Did you empty trashes to help your parents?
5. What did you do to keep your room clean?
6. Did you help with the dishes?
7. Was there anything else that you did to help your family?
8. Did your mom have a job outside the home?

Comparing Generations -- Entertainment

Student Name _____ Date _____

We have been studying about how boys and girls entertained themselves a long time ago. How do you entertain yourself now?

1. How much television do you watch each day?
2. How much do you read for pleasure each day?
3. How much time do you spend playing outside each day?
4. What is your favorite thing to do for fun?
5. Name the organized sports that you participate in.
6. How often do you play with friends after school?
7. How often do you play board or card games?
8. Where would be your favorite place to spend the day?
9. How much time do you spend playing on a computer?

Comparing Generations -- Entertainment

Dear Parents,

As part of our local history project we are talking about how boys and girls entertained themselves. Your child has made a list of some of the things that he/she likes to do. Please sit with your child and answer the following questions about how you entertained yourself when you were in third grade. If possible it would be wonderful if your child could interview a grandparent or an older person.

1. How much television did you watch each day?
2. How much did you read for pleasure each day?
3. How much time did you spend playing outside?
4. What was your favorite thing to do for pleasure?
5. Did you use a computer?
6. Name the organized sports that you participated in.
7. How often did you play with friends after school?
8. How often did you play board games or card games?
9. Where was your favorite place to spend an entire day?

Comparing Generations – Clothes

Name _____ Date _____

We have been talking about children that lived long ago in our valley. We have discussed the fact that they probably didn't have a lot of clothes like we do today. Write down information about the clothes that you have and the kind of clothes that you like.

What do you like to wear to school?

What do you wear for special times, like a party or to church?

Do you wear any kind of uniform for sports? What does it look like?

What is your favorite color?

Describe your favorite outfit.

How do you like to wear your hair?

Do you like to shop for your own clothes, or does your mother pick out the clothes you will wear?

Draw a picture of your favorite outfit.

Bring a picture out of a magazine of some clothes that you would like to wear.

Comparing Generations -- Clothes

Dear Parents,

As part of our local history project we are studying about the early lives of boys and girls who lived in the San Ramon Valley many years ago. Today we talked about the clothes that a young girl or boy might have worn on a farm in the San Ramon Valley. Today in class we talked about the clothes that we like to wear today. During the coming week we would like you to talk to your child about the fashions that were popular for boys and girls when you were in third grade. It would be great if you could include a picture of yourself when you were in third grade in clothes that you wore at that time. It would be great for your child if they could interview a grandparent or an older person with the same questions.

What did you usually wear to school?

What did you usually wear for special times, like church or going out to dinner?

Did you wear any type of uniform for sports or school?

What was your favorite color?

Describe your favorite outfit.

How did you wear your hair?

Did you shop for your clothes or did your mother pick them out for you?

Is there anything else you would like to say about fashions when you were in third grade?







