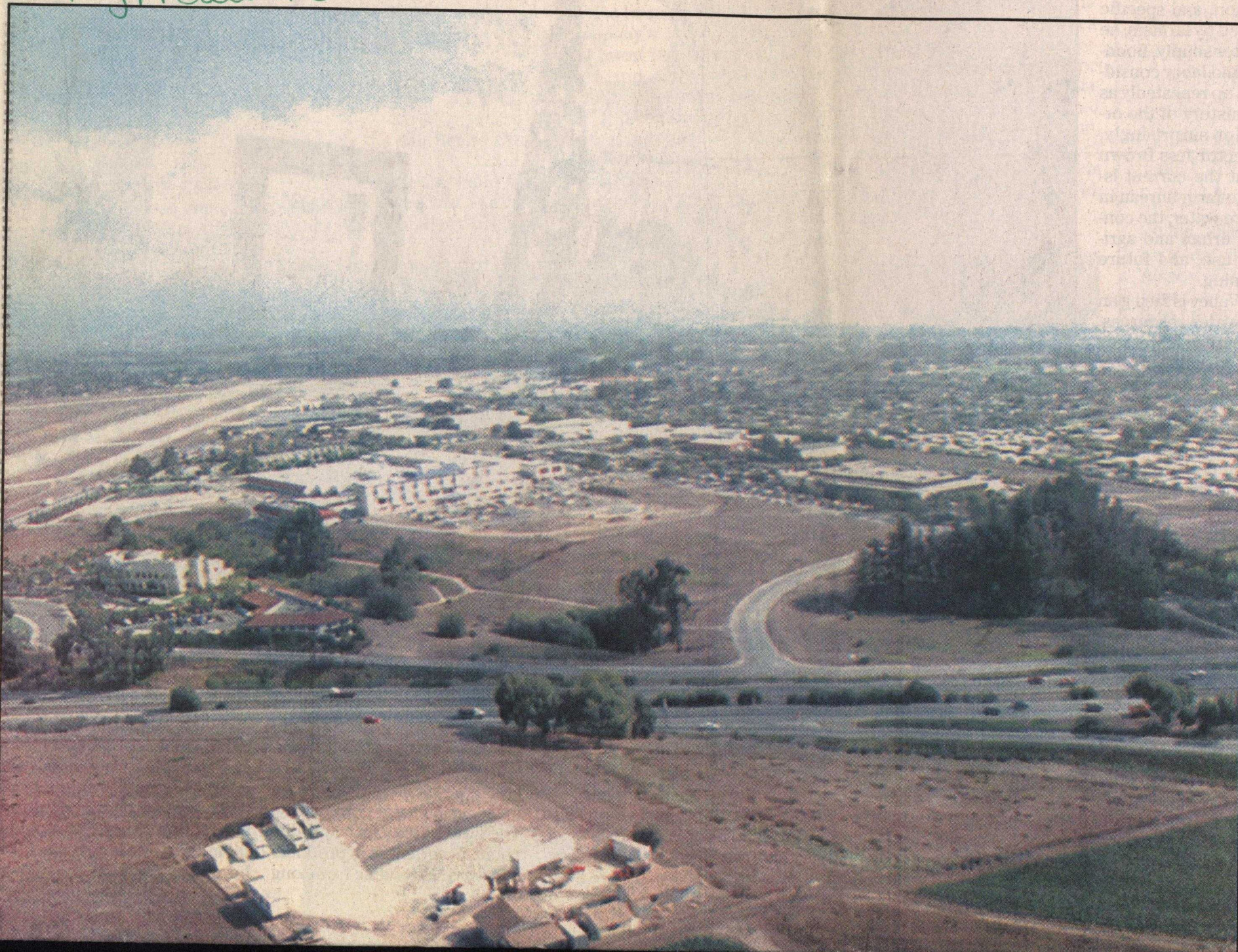


Agriculture

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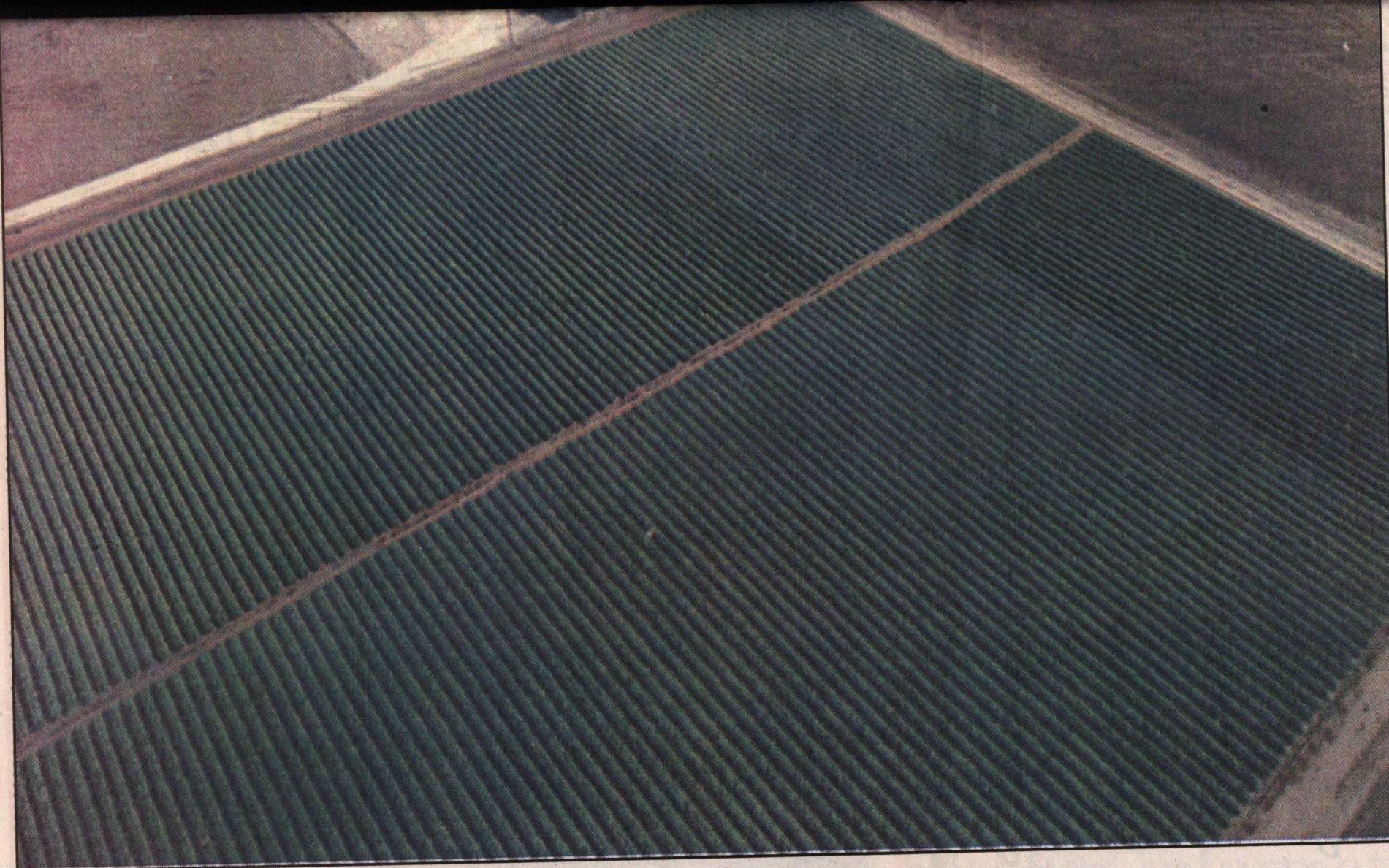


**Agriculture
looks to
challenges
and
changes**
*Farmers see
potential in
value-added
products*

AGRICULTURE — the lifeblood of the Pajaro Valley — is facing a multitude of challenges and opportunities this year.

Revenues have grown on several fronts. Farmers and their crews in the Pajaro Valley produced and sold \$507,948,000 in agricultural products last year in Pajaro Valley — up from \$441,105,000 in 1995.

Strawberries were worth \$167,819,000 in 1996 to Pajaro Valley growers compared to \$155,355,000 in 1995, the combined Pajaro Valley Crop Report from Monterey and Santa Cruz County Agricultural Commissioners found. Acreage rose from 5,827 acres in



1995 to 7,005 last year, but production per acre dropped from 28.75 to 24.88 tons in the same period.

Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner Richard Nutter explained that the decreased production may have resulted from reduced harvesting due to market pressures rather than decreased production by the plants. According to Nutter, a cyclospora food poisoning incident in Texas that was originally attributed to strawberries caused a market scare — even though it was eventually traced to Guatemalan raspberries.

Even with the decrease, Nutter notes that California is still the leading producer of strawberries in the nation. And according to Teresa Thorne, communications director of the California Strawberry Commission, 50 percent of California's strawberries come from the Watsonville/Salinas district.

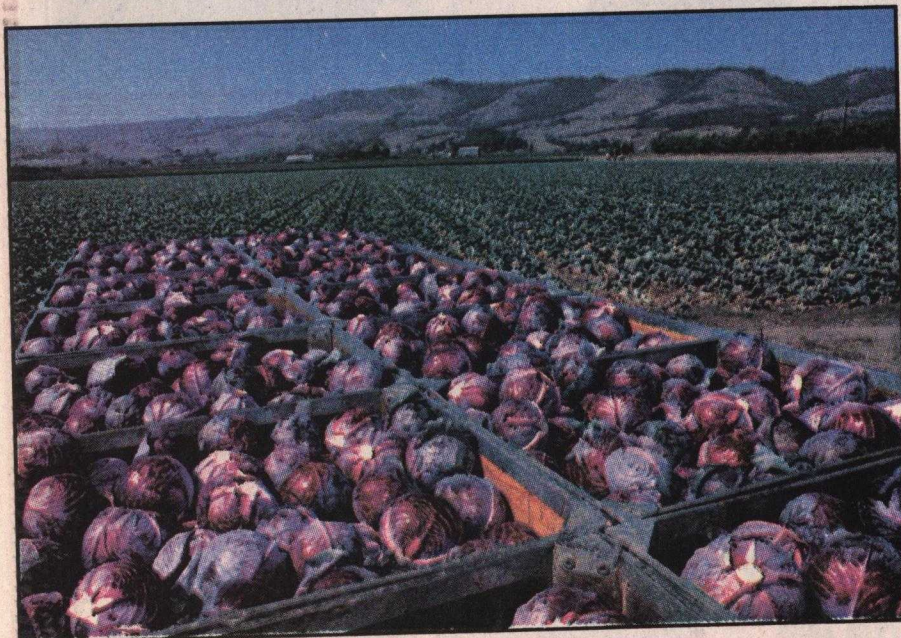
"We have some of the highest producing land, on specific frames, that's ever been recorded," says Santa Cruz County Deputy Agricultural Commissioner Rick Bergman.

Lettuce is still the No. 1 vegetable grown in the Pajaro Valley, with head lettuce racking up \$43,131,000 in 1996 sales. That's down, however, from the 1995 level of \$51,528,000. The value of leaf and romaine lettuce also fell in 1996, down from \$11,700,000 in 1995 to \$9,452,000 last year.

The big gains in the vegetable market were in the miscellaneous category — artichokes, brussels sprouts, bok choy, cilantro, mushrooms, parsley, and mixed lettuce. Sales rose from \$14,100,000 in 1995 for the category to \$94,621,000 last year. And vegetable farmers are moving into the pre-packaged salad mix business in a big way, in a move to expand their markets.

See AGRICULTURE, page 5

Photos by Tarmo Hannula



A special supplement to the REGISTER-PAJARONIAN Wednesday, September 24, 1997

Outlook 1997 Agriculture



Robeveto Romero Ojeda breaks down a temporary irrigation system at Lakeside Organic Farm.

Tarmo Hannula

AGRICULTURE

from page 1

The valley has largely recovered from the devastating 1995 flooding of the Pajaro River and largely escaped damage from last winter's storms. According to Bergman, farmers are waiting to see the effects of this year's El Nino.

A federal deadline for phasing out use of methyl bromide as a soil fumigant is fast approaching and there is — despite millions of dollars in research — no completely effective replacement for the chemical, which is believed to be an ozone layer depletor. But Thorne says the California Strawberry Commission is "not leaving any stone unturned" in the search for an alternative.

Strawberry growers are also facing challenges on the labor front, with the United Farm Workers and its parent — the AFL-CIO — making an all-out effort to organize the field workers in the valley and throughout California.

The current overdraw of the local water supply has led to concern of environmentalists, particularly in regard to the possible importation of water. Environmentalists have also

expressed concerns about pesticide use in areas where homes have been developed in recent years.

Farmers are adapting to the changing market pressures and demands, said Jess Brown, executive director of the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau.

Apple grower Jim Rider is just one example cited by Brown. Rider has converted all of his apple orchards to organic and found a growing market for his crops.

Lettuce grower Jim Peixoto has also tapped into the steadily growing market for organically grown products, Brown added.

"Those who are doing better this year are those who have some uniqueness or value-added products," Brown added.

Flower growers have been able to compete in the national and world markets with "value-added" products — flowers made up into bouquets, Brown added.

"The flower industry, as a whole, has faced some difficult times because of the imports," Brown noted. "It used to be that a flower grower would specialize in one type — such as roses. What we are now seeing is a diversity of flowers grown by growers trying to find a niche market."



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