



The Kiwi Vine

Newsletter of the Kiwifruit Administrative Committee

May 26, 2026

CALIFORNIA KIWIFRUIT: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Kiwifruit was introduced into the United States in the early 1930's with the first experimental vines grown at the USDA Plant Introduction Station in Chico, California. Established in 1904, this was a premier federal facility for testing foreign plant species and helping to adapt them for American agricultural use.

Robert Smith, a research horticulturist based at the Chico Plant Station, was the first to demonstrate that kiwifruit could be successfully grown in California. In 1960 Carl Heinke became the first commercial grower of California kiwifruit when he planted nine vines next to his grapes in Paradise.

In 1965, following an unseasonal rain that destroyed most of their cling peach crop, the Tanimoto brothers of Gridley were ready to try something new. They obtained some seeds and cuttings from Smith and in 1968 planted one acre of kiwifruit, harvesting their first commercial crop in 1971.

At about this same time, Judd Ingram from the Delano/McFarland area in Kern County became interested in growing kiwifruit. The plant material he received from the Chico Plant Station was not successful, and in 1966 he obtained a permit to import plants from New Zealand.

The first commercial crop of California kiwifruit (growers Tanimoto, Ingram & Heinke) was sold in 1971 by Frieda Caplan, owner of the Los Angeles distribution firm, Produce Specialties, Inc. With Los Angeles wholesale market prices at \$1.50 per pound, the interest in planting kiwifruit increased rapidly.

In 1977 there were approximately 1,200 acres and the first significant commercial crop of 300,000 7-pound trays was harvested. Industry plantings skyrocketed in the 1980's and peaked at 9,700 acres in 1989.

Kiwifruit plantings were as far south as San Diego County and as far north as Shasta County. Many growers originally took on kiwifruit as a secondary crop. Most of the early plantings were small – less than 5 acres and it wasn't uncommon for a grower to clear out a small section of his farm to plant kiwifruit. This was especially true in the Gridley area which earned the nickname of the "Kiwifruit Capital of the World".

The highest production of Hayward kiwifruit occurred in 1992 with approximately 12.5 million tray equivalents. During this time period there were over 650 growers, 68 packers and 50 marketers.

As new kiwifruit acreage came into production in California and other areas around the world, average prices came down from their early highs. The production peak of 1992 was accompanied by record low prices. The growers' response to low prices was to reduce new plantings, remove marginal acreage and investigate alternative methods for lowering production costs, increasing yields per acre and improving market returns.

Growers who had enthusiastically planted kiwifruit realized that the crop had very specific cultural needs and that it was not an economically sound crop to grow in certain regions. Following a steady decline in the mid to late 1990's acreage leveled out in the early 2000's with the Hayward acreage staying around 4,000 acres for the past 25 years. It is currently at 4,400 acres.

Around 2012 new varieties of kiwifruit including several red and gold varieties of the *A. chinensis* species and a green Mega variety were planted in California. The current acreage total for non-Hayward varieties is 750.

Today there are 123 growers, 15 packers and 19 marketers.

California kiwifruit producers organized in 1977 and formed “The Kiwifruit Growers of California.” This group was instrumental in securing the California legislature’s approval of the California Kiwifruit Commission (CKC) in 1980 providing an organizational structure through which the industry could address production and marketing problems. The CKC ceased operation after the 2010/11 crop year.

The Kiwifruit Administrative Committee (KAC) was established in 1984. It is a federal marketing order, operating under the USDA. The KAC sets minimum standards for quality, grade, size and maturity. In 2014 authority was added allowing the marketing order to conduct cultural research and market research and development.

In the 1970’s the U.S. Forest Service took over management of the USDA Plant Introduction Station in Chico. Today the 209-acre site, known as The Chico Seed Orchard, is operated by the Mendocino National Forest for research, gene conservation, and forest restoration. The Chico Seed Orchard is open to the public where the “mother” and “father” kiwifruit vines planted in 1934 are still present.

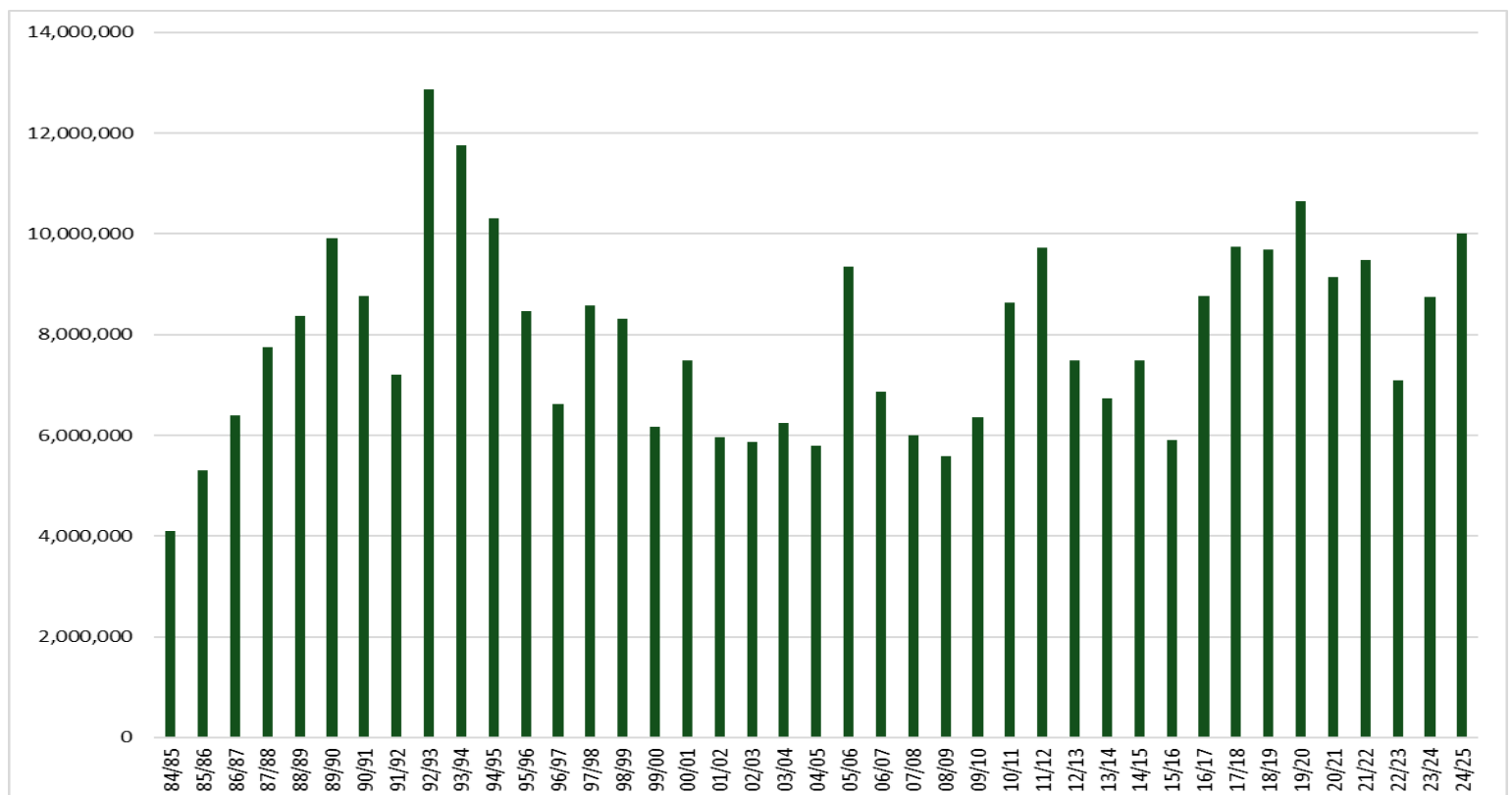
What is a Tray Equivalent (te)?

When we talk about kiwifruit production, we refer to the crop in terms of “tray equivalents” (te). A tray equivalent is based on 7 pounds. To convert any pack style to a tray equivalent, divide the container weight by 7.

In the 1970’s, almost 100% of the crop was packed into single layer trays. During the 1980’s, trays made up over 80% of the pack style. During most of the 1990’s minimum tray weights were a condition of the KAC inspection requirement.

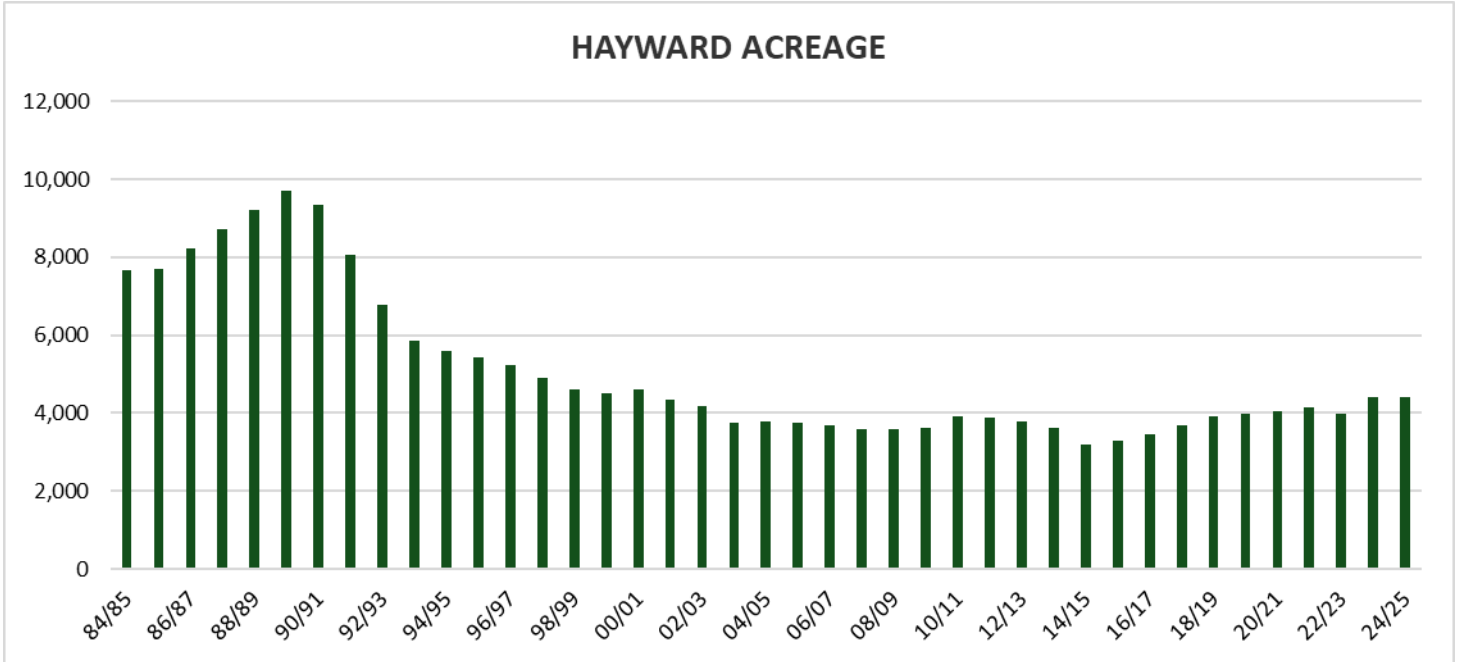
Today the most widely used shipping container is the 9 kg (19.8 pound) volume fill, at 46% of the crop. Less than 1% of the crop is packed in trays. For consistency purposes official crop estimates and production records continue to be calculated and recorded in tray equivalents.

CALIFORNIA HAYWARD KIWIFRUIT PRODUCTION (TE) 1984/85 to 2024/25

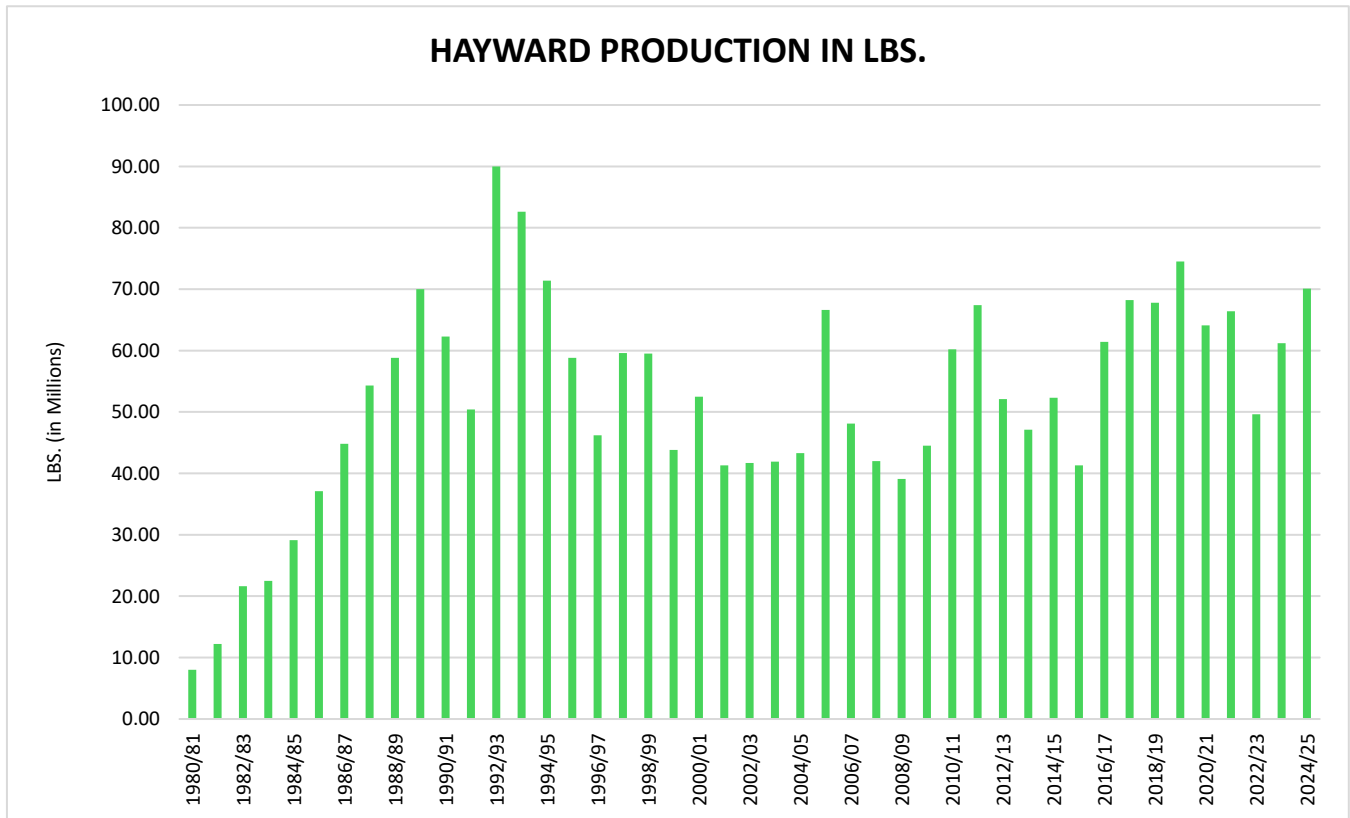


HISTORICAL ACREAGE

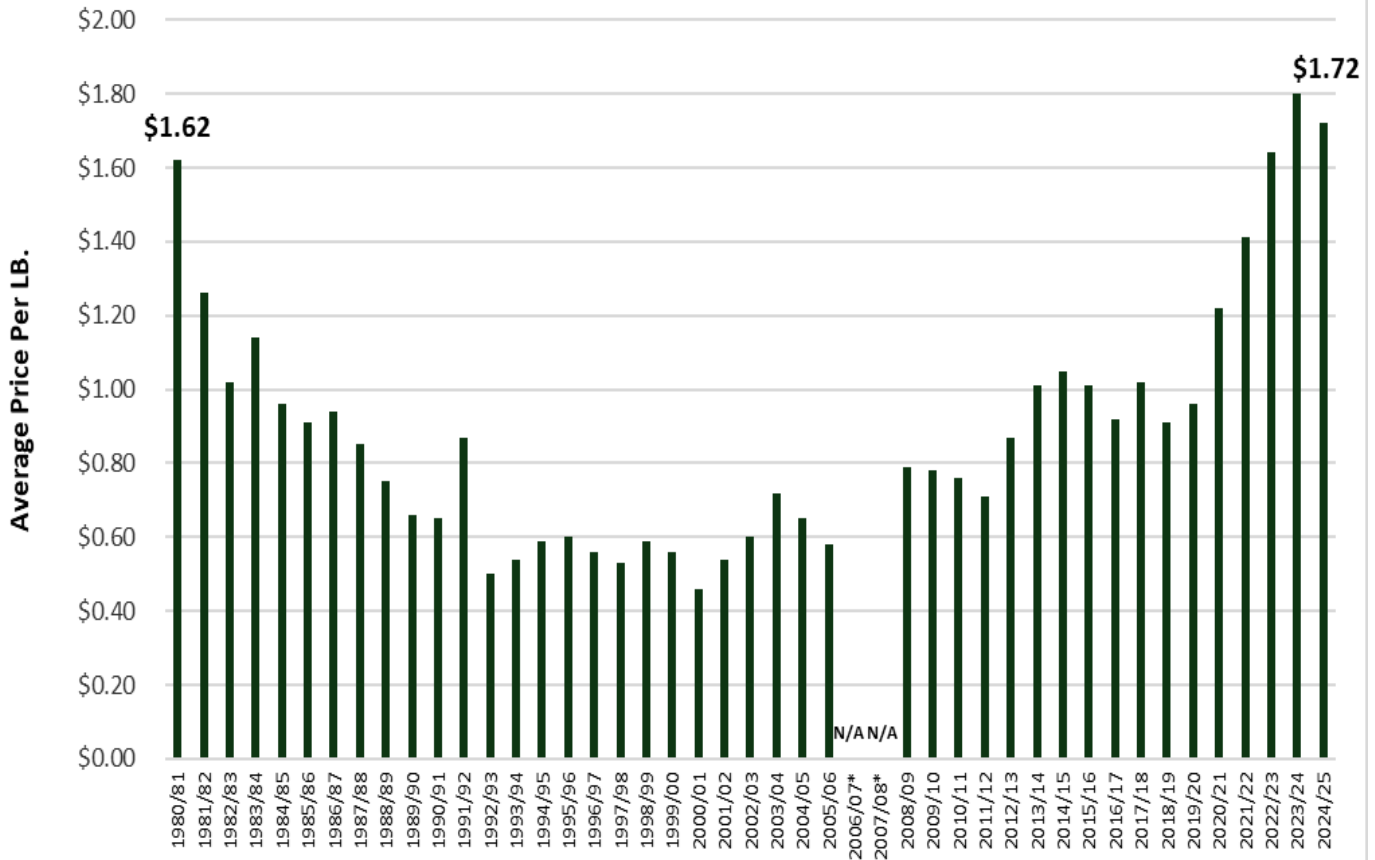
The following charts provide a historical overview of California kiwifruit acreage, production trends, and grower returns over time



PRODUCTION IN LBS. & AVERAGE PER POUND FOB VALUE 1980/81 to 2024/25 (HAYWARD)



AVERAGE FOB VALUE PER LB.



*FOB sales reports not available in 2006/07 – 2007/08

ALL PRODUCING KIWIFRUIT ACREAGE BY COUNTY

Today, commercial kiwifruit production remains concentrated in several key growing regions throughout California.

COUNTY	Hayward Acres	Chinensis Acres	Mega Acres
TULARE	1,584	57	65
YUBA	1,055	255	
FRESNO	794	20	225
BUTTE	565		6
MADERA	90		
SUTTER	105		
KINGS	152	107	
OTHER*	73		
TOTAL	4,418	439	296

* MERCED, PLACER, SACRAMENTO, SAN JOAQUIN

KAC ASSESSMENT RATE AND BUDGET

The KAC continues to support industry activities through handler assessments authorized under the federal marketing order. The KAC is financed through handler assessments. The KAC assessment rate for the 2025/26 crop year is \$0.035 per 9 kilo (19.8 pound) volume fill container.

KAC Administration Budget	2025/26 Budget
Management	90,000
Postage	750
Telephone	1,600
Office Supplies	750
Photocopies	500
Staff Travel	5,000
Meeting Expense	200
Audit Expense	8,500
D&O Liability Insurance	2,500
CDFA - Restyle Spot-checks	500
IKO (travel and delegate expense)	10,000
IKO Shared Country Cost	3,000
Website	500
Cultural Research	25,000
Miscellaneous	300
Total Cash Expense	149,100

INTERNATIONAL KIWIFRUIT ORGANIZATION (IKO)

The International Kiwifruit Organization (IKO) consists of organizations from the world's leading kiwifruit producing countries: Chile, Italy, France, Greece, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain, and the United States.

The IKO provides an opportunity for producing countries to exchange production and acreage data, discuss biosecurity issues and share industry trends and challenges. The goal of the IKO is to provide a united voice and to foster a worldwide acceptance of kiwifruit.

IKO does not accept individual growers or private companies as members. Participation is limited to a national kiwifruit industry group or association. The California kiwifruit industry, first through the CKC, and now the KAC, has participated in the IKO since its inception in 1981. Reports from all member countries are available on the California kiwifruit website.

KAC CONTINUANCE REFERENDUM

The USDA is conducting a continuance referendum among eligible kiwifruit growers, May 18 through June 8, 2026.

The order requires USDA to conduct a continuance referendum every six years between May 15 and July 15. To be eligible to vote, growers within the production area must have produced kiwifruit during the period of Aug. 1, 2024, through July 31, 2025, and would consider termination of the KAC if **less than** 50% of the growers voting in the referendum, and **less than** 50% of the kiwifruit volume represented in the referendum, vote in favor of continuance. **Please vote.** There are 123 growers eligible to vote. **YOUR** vote will make a difference!