The beginning of agriculture in California dates back to 1760's, when Spanish missionaries extended their activities to the Alta California. In order to develop a string of missions from San Diego to Sonoma from 1769 to 1823, their strategy was to introduce live stocks, field crops, and horticulture. They produced mainly grains, specially wheat and maize, and cattles. They also invest in irrigation schemes and in the development of primitive industry process (e.g. wine, flour, dairy products), with the only purpose of feeding the settlers and natives in the area. The Gold Rush era changed the agriculture in California to a more commercial focused agriculture, were farmers started to sell their products to non-natives miners that arrived from all over the country. It was possible because without railroads in the state, it was very difficult to bring stocks from others parts of the country. When the Gold Rush era was over and railroads had been constructed many workers transitioned to agriculture.

Today, agriculture is very important to California’s economy, employing now over 17.5 million people and having generate $43.5 billion in revenue in 2011. The state is the number 1 producer of diary in the country. California has 81.700 farms distributed in 25.4 million acres, which represents less the 4% of the U.S. farms. However, California is the world 5th largest supplier of agricultural commodities and the largest producer of food in the U.S. The unique climate allows farmers to grow over 450 different crops, some exclusive to the state: almonds (largest exporter in the world), artichokes, dates, figs, kiwifruit, olives (70 – 80% of all the ripe olives in the U.S.), persimmons, pomegranates, pistachios, prunes, raisins, cloves and walnuts. California produces 86% of lemons, 94% of processed tomatoes, 83% of fresh and frozen strawberries, 43% of green onions, and 25% of onions of the country.

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