

MINIDOKA COUNTY  
A BRIEF LOOK  
2008



**University of Idaho**  
Extension  
*Minidoka County*

## HISTORY

The winding path of the Snake River, which borders the area now known as Minidoka County, was the route of many early pioneers heading further west. Minidoka Village, established in 1884, was the first permanent settlement in what would become Minidoka County and served as a railroad siding. The U. S. Bureau of Reclamation has stated that "Minidoka" is a Shoshoni name meaning "broad expanse".

In the early 1900's, government-owned land was made available for settlement and ownership by homesteading. Homesteaders were required to file a claim, live on the land for three years and do a limited amount of farming. Around 1912, many homesteaders came to live in the neighborhood of Kimama and Minidoka. These attempts were plagued by lack of rainfall, frost, wind and natural pests. By 1932 most of these homesteads had been abandoned.

President Theodore Roosevelt signed the Reclamation Act on 17 June 1902 paving the way for the creation of the Minidoka Project. The project was established by the Secretary of the Interior on 23 April 1904 and work began on the diversion works that year. Contracts were let for the construction of canals and laterals shortly thereafter. Delivery of water to the land began in 1907.

The rush of settlers started in 1904 and increased rapidly for two and a half years. Entrepreneurs with a desire to own land and establish homes came from everywhere. However, very few had any experience with irrigation and many mistakes were made by both the settlers and the engineers who were designing the project. As a result many of the settlers failed and left their claims. Those who persevered were eventually rewarded for their efforts.

Minidoka Dam, an earth-fill structure with a concrete powerhouse and spillway section, was the key part of the entire project. The power plant is the oldest hydro-electric power plant operated by the Bureau of Reclamation. The first generating unit was placed in service and the first water was pumped using electric power from the plant in 1909. Two more units were placed in service in 1910 and the fourth and fifth were ready for operation in 1911. The sixth unit was completed in 1942.

Three town sites were laid out by the Bureau of Reclamation. The town of Heyburn was surveyed and lots were sold beginning 20 October 1906. It was

originally called Riverton but the name was later changed to honor Senator Heyburn. It was intended that this settlement would become the major city in the region since the railroad met with the Snake River nearby. However, when the lots located around the central square were offered for sale, prospective buyers considered them too expensive. Cheaper lots away from the square were purchased for commercial use and the central business core never flourished. Thus, the City of Rupert which is several miles away from the river became the hub for development in Minidoka County.

A site where the first well was dug was called Wellfirst or Wetfirst. The development became the City of Rupert although the origin of that name has never been definitively established. The town of Rupert was platted on 21 November 1905 and siting documents were filed in Lincoln County on 8 February 1907. There were no restrictions governing the town site in 1904 and 1905 and several businesses had already been erected around a central square. The owners were considered squatters with no ownership right to the lots they had developed. The dispute was resolved by legislation which allowed the squatters to purchase their lots at designated prices. The Village of Rupert was incorporated in April 1906 and a town board was selected and sworn in. They held their first meeting the same day.

Four men first selected claims near what later became the City of Paul. They struggled with drought for three years until the arrival of irrigation water in 1907. In 1910 the railroad was extended to the vicinity and crossed land which had been homesteaded by Jim Ellis. Ellis recognized an opportunity for future development and hired an engineer to survey a town site. The town was named for C. H. Paul, the engineer in charge of the Minidoka Project.

Another settlement in the County was originally called Scherrer after an early settler who established a store and warehouse. The government refused to accept the name and when the post office was built it was called Acequia, a Spanish word meaning "water course". The name may have come from the fact that the A and B canals of the Minidoka Irrigation District split from the Northside Canal just outside of town.

Minidoka County is distinguished by the fact that large tracts of land were opened to homestead development on two separate occasions. Both of these occurred within the lifetime of some of the original residents. The first homestead opportunity came as a result of the construction of the Minidoka Dam in 1904 and opened up some 55,000 acres to gravity flow irrigation.

The second opportunity came when the Northside Pumping Project was developed between 1954 and 1961. There were 76,802 acres of homestead land offered. Homesteads were awarded to qualified applicants by lottery with drawings beginning in 1953. An additional 70,000 acres were brought under irrigation by other developers and are located in the same vicinity as the homesteaded area. Acreage was added annually through 1965.

Considering all the hardships and triumphs of the early homesteaders and the growth and development of the various communities, the early history of Minidoka County is as colorful and interesting as in any other comparable region in our country.

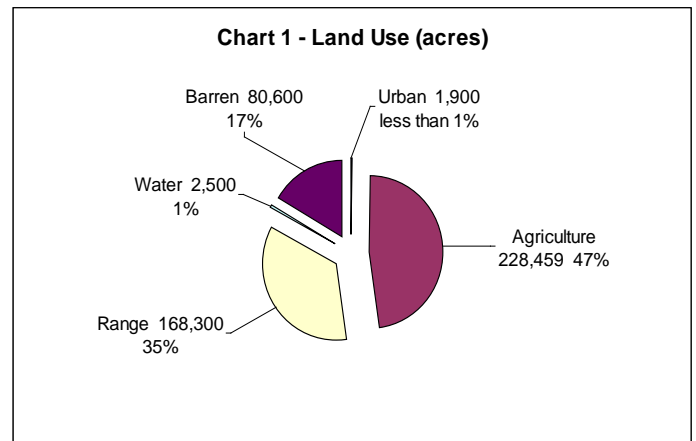
### PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Minidoka County is located along the fertile Snake River plain in south-central Idaho. It is approximately 160 miles northwest of Salt Lake City, Utah, 90 miles west of Pocatello and 150 miles southeast of Boise, Idaho. The county contains 750 square miles or approximately 486,000 acres of total area of which 47% or 229,000 acres is designated as agricultural land. The county has a rather unique topography. The southern third borders the current path of the Snake River and is, in fact, part of the original riverbed. This portion is irrigated by a gravity flow system with water taken from the river at Minidoka Dam. The central section is at a somewhat higher elevation and contains the Northside Project. It is irrigated by a system of deep wells with surface ditches and buried pipeline for water distribution. The far northern section of the county consists of lava flows with isolated areas of arable land irrigated by additional deep wells. Although the land surface is varied in elevation, there are only 200 feet of difference in elevation from the lowest point at the southwest corner at 4180 feet to the highest point in the northeast corner with an elevation of 4380 feet above sea level.

### Land

The lands within Minidoka County boundaries have varied appearance and uses. The classifications used in this report are consistent with U. S. Geological Survey designations. Nearly one half of the acreage in the county is classified as agricultural. When the acreage suitable for grazing is added, it is only natural that Minidoka County would have a decidedly rural character.

The details of land use in the county are summarized in Chart 1. The water category and the rounding and estimating of satellite-based data usually results in slightly higher totals for land use. The land classified as barren consists mostly of lava flows located in the northern part of the county. It is part of a much larger lava containing area which extends across several counties in south central Idaho.



### Land Ownership

Chart 2 displays a breakdown of the ownership of the lands in the county. The data is summarized from information contained in the Idaho Department of Commerce County Profiles and the 2002 U.S.D.A. Census of Agriculture. Minidoka has the distinction of being one of the counties in the state of Idaho which has a majority of its land in private ownership.

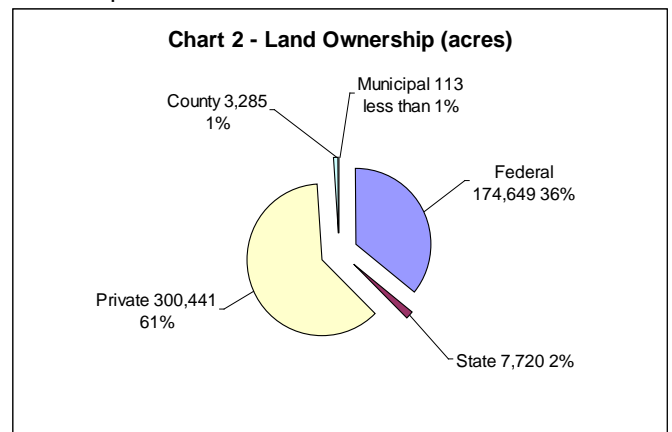


Table 1 shows a summary of the land use by agricultural producers in Minidoka County and how that usage has changed. This data was also extracted from the Census of Agriculture.

U.S.D.A. conducts the census every five years and provides information on various topics of interest, (2007 Census data will be available Feb 2009).

The total land used by farmers as well as the total irrigated acreage has increased during the time period covered by the data. The decline in number of farms is indicative of the movement toward fewer and larger farms which has been observed throughout the country. The increasing value per acre and the values for machinery and equipment are driven by general price inflation as well as increases in the size and complexity of farming operations.

Table 1: Inventory - Farms, Cropland & Livestock

	Unit	1987	1992	1997	2002
Land in Farms	Acre	207,965	208,161	206,882	228,459
Irrigated land	Acre	145,670	177,516	180,791	197,243
Number of Farms	#	858	774	674	694
Avg Farm Size	Acre	242	269	307	329
Bldgs & Land					
Avg Value/Farm	\$\$\$	266,561	336,218	537,948	670,789
Avg Value/Acre	\$\$\$	1,141	1,261	1,856	2,000
Machine & Equip					
Avg Value/Farm	\$\$\$	70,678	99,307	128,936	154,999

Table 2 is a summary of the changes that have occurred in the number of farms by size categories. It shows that the number of rural residences have increased over the last fifteen years covered by the data. This illustrates the desire of an increasing number of families to enjoy a rural lifestyle while earning a living off-farm. The number of commercial sized operations in the 50 to 999 acre range decreased during the period while the number of farms with acreage of 1,000 or more has increased. This fact is further demonstration of the trend noted above toward fewer but larger farms.

Table 2: Farms by Size

Acreage	1987	1992	1997	2002
Under 10	126	134	129	152
10 to 49	168	141	157	203
50 to 179	216	181	135	121
180 to 499	252	201	130	120
500 to 999	62	80	79	51
Over 999	34	37	44	47

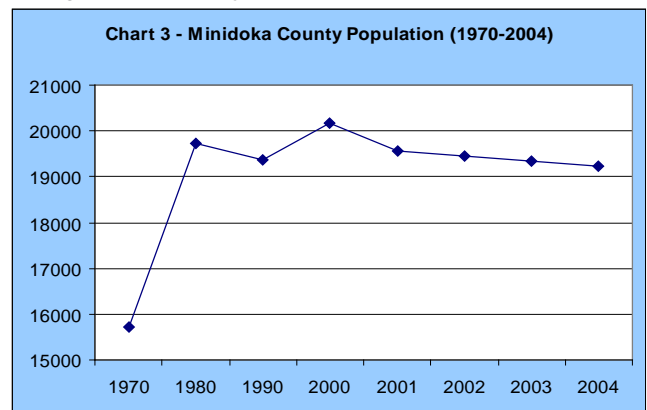
## PEOPLE

The physical environment creates a backdrop for the most important component of any community - the people who live there. Many of the people who live in

Minidoka County have an appreciation for its cultural roots and peaceful surroundings. The community is home to an energetic and caring population who are concerned about family relationships and desire to prosper in a stable economic environment with limited bureaucratic interference. The county has experienced sporadic population growth recently but seems to be positioned for a substantial expansion during the next few years.

## Population and Demographics

As can be readily observed in Chart 3, the population of the county increased rapidly in the decade of the 1970's before slowing in its gain and finally declining modestly during the last few years.

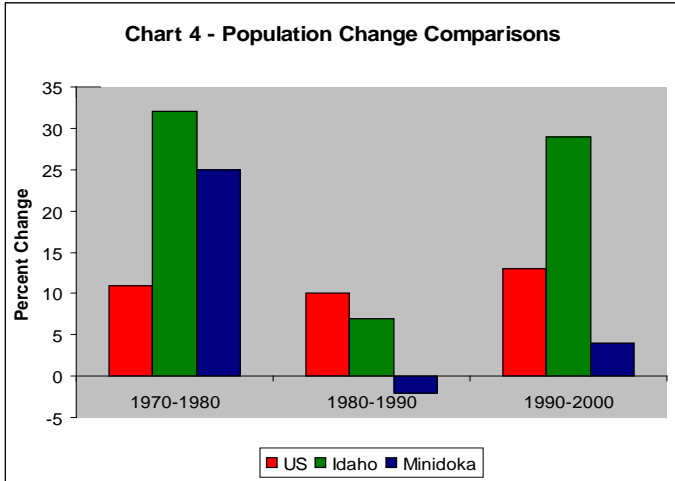


The demographic data in Table 3 illustrates some of the components of the population changes mentioned above. The birth rate has slowed over the period while the number of deaths has increased each decade. Also the net migration which was positive during the 1970's went negative sometime in the 1980's and has remained so through the latest available data. The data also shows gradual aging of the population with decreasing numbers in the younger age categories while the older categories are increasing each decade. The data also reveals that the number of persons per household is gradually declining.

Table 3 - Minidoka County Demographics

	1970/80	1980/90	1990/00	2000/02
Births	4400	3991	3646	754
Deaths	1200	1351	1524	420
Net Migration	800	-2997	-1309	-1075
Median Age	25.9	30.4	33.5 *	
Under 18 Yrs (%)	36.8	35.1	31.6	29.7
18 to 64 Yrs (%)	54.7	52.5	55.2	56.1
65 Yrs and Up (%)	8.5	12.5	13.2	14.2
Persons/Household	3.12	2.96	2.87 *	

It is often interesting to compare the changes occurring locally with those taking place in a wider area. Chart 4 is a comparison of population changes in Minidoka County, the State of Idaho and in the U.S.



It shows that the population growth rate in Minidoka County actually exceeded that of the U.S. in the 1970's and was only slightly behind that of the State of Idaho. The graph also indicates that growth at all levels slowed significantly in the 1980's and even was negative in the County as we have previously noted. In the 1990's growth rates increased again, particularly in the state, while the rate in Minidoka County, which once again turned positive, still lagged behind both the state and national rates.

The population changes of the incorporated cities and towns within the county are a mixed bag. Most have experienced periods of increase interspersed with slight declines during the last 34 years. The details are shown below in Table 4.

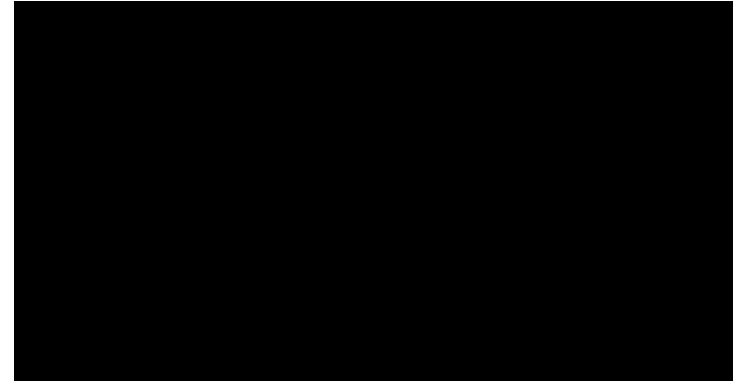
Table 4 - Population, County & Cities

	1970	1980	1990	2004
Acequia	107	100	106	144
Heyburn	1637	2889	2714	2781
Minidoka	131	101	67	129
No. Burley	200	236	282	242
Paul	911	940	901	953
Rupert	4563	5476	5455	5303
County	15731	19718	19361	19229

Hispanic Population

Hispanic residents made up 26.9% of the population in 2004, compared to 8.9% in Idaho and 14.1% in the U.S.

The proportion of Hispanic residents is also growing within the County, from 15.2% in 1980, to 19.3% in 1990, to 26.9% in 2004.



Employment

One component of the people who live in a community is the labor which they provide to the local economy. The workforce in Minidoka County has changed over the last several years as local economic conditions have evolved.

Table 5 - Employment by Industry

Year	2001	2002	2003
Total Number Employed	10,871	10,720	10,035
Percent by Industry			
Farm	14.8	15.6	15.5
Government	13.9	14.1	14.9
Manufacturing	17.4	16.2	12
Wholesale trade	7.6	7.4	7.8
Retail trade	6.9	7	7.4
Forestry, Fishing, Other	7	7	7.1
Hotel and Food Services	4.8	4.9	5.5
Other services	4.6	5	5.5

Table 5 displays the changes in total employment in the county over the most recent three year period and a percentage breakdown of employment in some major industry categories. The total employment numbers showed a decline, most of which was covered in the manufacturing category. Several of the categories including the government and service sectors enjoyed increases. These changes mirror national trends in employment. The farm category also displayed a modest increase.

The labor force participation is a measurement of the ratio of potential workers in a community over the age of sixteen who are actually involved in the labor force.

A positive change in the participation percentage is an indication that workers are being enticed into employment by new opportunities or higher wages. A negative change indicates that workers are choosing to leave active work perhaps to gain additional education or have become discouraged with the employment choices and pay.

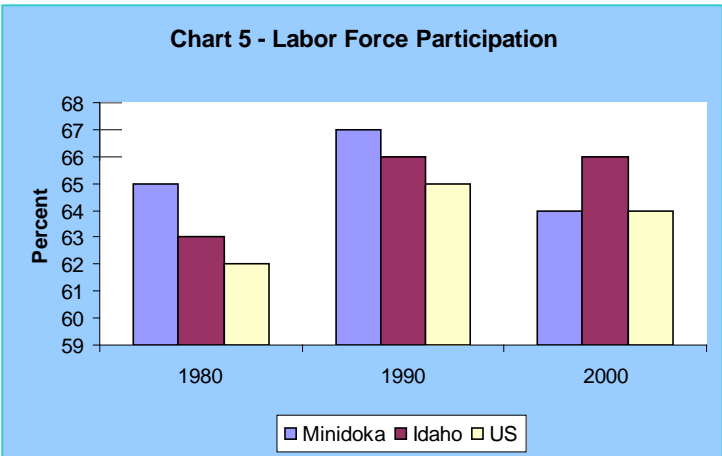
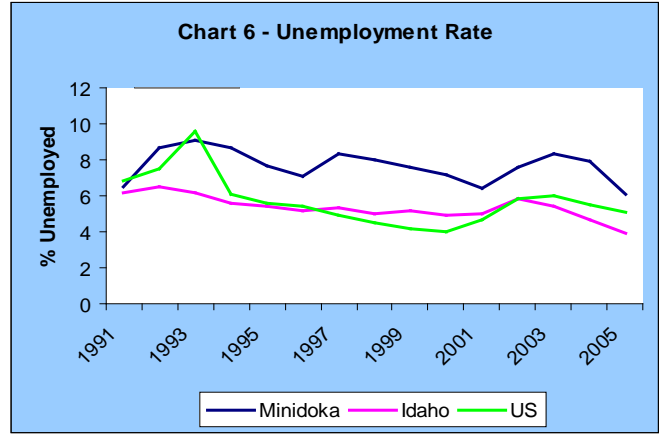


Chart 5 displays the changing labor force participation picture in Minidoka County and includes comparison numbers for Idaho and the U.S. It indicates that the Minidoka County rate was higher than either the Idaho or U.S. rate in 1980. The ratio held in 1990 at higher levels. The county and U.S. rates had fallen by 2000 while the Idaho rate was unchanged.

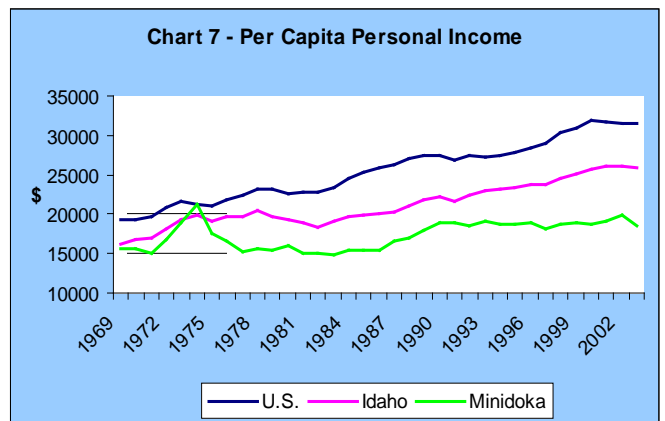
Another important indicator of employment vitality in a community is total unemployment as reported by the Labor Division of the Department of Commerce. Chart 6 shows the changes over the last fourteen years. The rate has been in gradual decline through the period, indicating improvement in the employment picture.



Minidoka County unemployment while improving, has been more variable, showing some brief periods of rising unemployment while enjoying a general decline over the period. It has also maintained a higher level when compared to state and national numbers for most of the fourteen years.

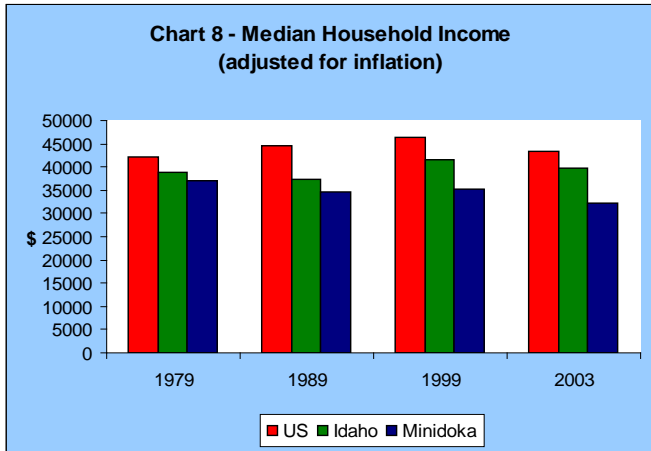
Income

One useful measurement of the viability of an economy is the total income of a region spread among the total population or per capita personal income. Chart 7 shows how per capita income has been changing in Minidoka County with comparisons for Idaho and the U.S. While per capita income in Minidoka County has generally increased over the 34 year period covered by the chart, there have been periods with little increase and the levels have consistently been below those of Idaho or the U.S.



Another way to measure income growth is median household income. It is the income level at which half of the households have higher combined incomes and half have lower combined incomes.

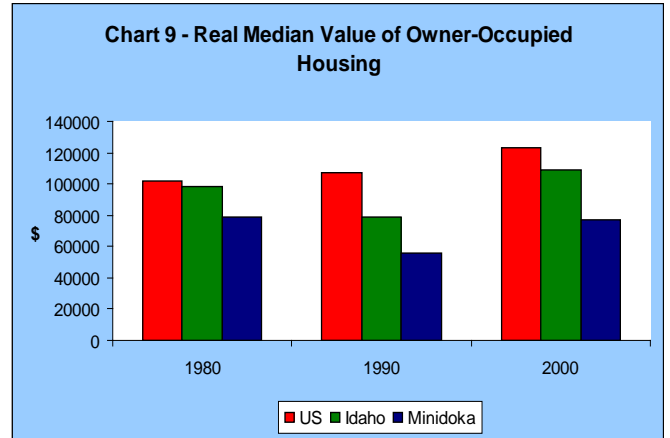
Chart 8 shows median household income in Minidoka with comparisons with the State of Idaho and the U.S.



The chart shows that the Minidoka County median level of household income has been quite consistent across the reporting period with a slight decline for the 2003 report.

Housing

Another measurement of the vitality of a community is the availability of affordable housing for its residents. The median value of owner-occupied housing is shown in Chart 9. This is the level at which one half of the owner-occupied houses have higher value and half have lower values. The chart shows that the values for Minidoka County have lagged behind those for the State of Idaho and the U.S. in every period reported. It also indicates that the disparity has fluctuated between the reporting periods.



The tables below provide some additional demographic information about the vitality of housing within the county.

Table 6: Housing Demographics (All Houses)

	1980	1990	2000
Housing Units	6876	7044	7498
Owner occupied	4913	4820	5364
Renter occupied	1279	1652	1609
Vacant	684	572	525
Median Value	\$ 36,700	\$ 41,400	\$ 74,600
Median Rent	\$ 125	\$ 184	\$ 394

Table 7: Age of Housing

Time Period	No. of Houses Built
Before 1940	1062
1940-1959	1860
1960-1969	1030
1970-1979	2056
1980-1989	714
1990-Mar 2000	776

NATURAL RESOURCES

Climate

The climate in Minidoka is typical for semi-arid mountain valleys in the western U.S. Precipitation averages 9.5 inches in the county. The highest annual precipitation was 13.07 inches in 1980 and the lowest was 6.35 inches in 1979. The January average minimum temperature is 15 degrees with an all time minimum of -8 degrees. The July average high temperature is 90 degrees with an all time recorded high of 104. The typical growing season has between 120 and 135 frost-free days.

## Soils

The types and quality of soil in the county vary widely but can be grouped by general location. The northern parts of the county are generally made up of silt loam soils overlaid on basalt or lava plains. These soils can be either deep or shallow. The deeper soils are suitable for farming while the shallower areas are either barren or used for grazing. The southeastern part of the county has sandy and fine sandy loam soils overlaid on basalt plains. These wind-laid deposits are deep in some places and in others the rock ledges are exposed. A portion of these lands are suitable for farming. The southern part of county is made up of sandy to silty clay loam soils on alluvial terraces in the vicinity of the Snake River. The soil types lend themselves very well to agriculture except where a shallow water table makes them unfit.

## Water

As a result of the arid nature of the area, irrigation has been the means of changing the county from a desert to an area conducive to productive agriculture. The Minidoka Project supplies surface water from the Snake River to approximately 72,000 acres land in the county. The water is diverted at Minidoka Dam and distributed through a system of canals and laterals to individual landowners. Many producers employ pressurized sprinkler systems to distribute water to their fields. The balance of the irrigation water is sourced in deep wells which are either part of the Northside Project or privately owned. Together they irrigate some 125,000 acres in the county. Many of these acres are also watered by pressurized sprinkler systems although some gravity flow irrigation systems are used. The county has no notable bodies of surface water beyond the Snake River and Lake Walcott which was formed by the completion of Minidoka Dam.

Potable water for the incorporated communities of Minidoka County is provided by municipal systems which typically use well water as their source. Rural residents rely on private domestic wells as a potable water source. Some of these wells are fairly shallow especially near the Snake River where a perched aquifer exists. Sewage disposal in the incorporated communities is provided by municipal systems. Areas outside of municipalities dispose of liquid waste by means of private septic tank and field drain systems.

## AGRICULTURE

### Crops

The combination of fertile soil, sufficient water and a suitable climate provide the potential for a productive agricultural industry. The addition of competent operators complete the formula and consequently the county has become a place where abundant crops are produced. Agricultural producers function in a complex and challenging economic environment and have survived only through careful management and with the use of cutting edge techniques and modern equipment. Data acquired from several sources show the current production and economic impact of the major crops which are produced in the county.

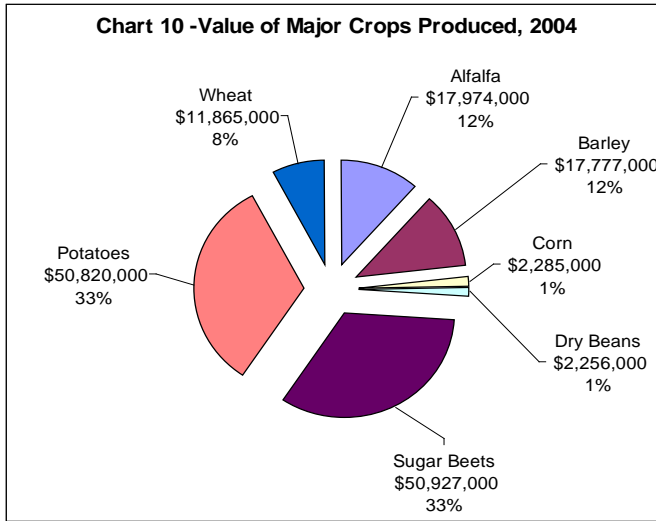
Table 8 is a summary of the production of the major crops planted and harvested in the county during 2004, the most recent year for which individual county data is published.

Table 8: Minidoka County - Crops Production (acres)

	<u>Planted</u>	<u>Harvested</u>	<u>Avg Yield</u>	<u>Unit</u>	<u>Total Yield</u>
All Wheat (2004)	32,700	31,900	106.3	bu.	3,390,970
Spring Wheat (2004)	23,000	22,700	101.8	bu.	2,310,860
Irrigated		21,900	104.9	bu.	2,298,000
Dry Land		800	15	bu.	12,000
Winter Wheat (2004)	9,700	9,200	117.4	bu.	1,080,080
Irrigated		8,600	124	bu.	1,066,000
Dry Land		600	23.3	bu.	14,000
Barley (2004)	51,000	49,000	123	bu.	6,027,000
Sugar Beets (2004)	50,300	50,200	27.3	tons	1,370,460
Corn (2004)	4,500				
Grain		900	140	bu.	126,000
Silage		3,600	22.2	tons	80,000
Alfalfa Hay (2004)		27,500	6	tons	164,900
Irrigated		27,000	6.07	tons	164,000
Dry Land		500	1.8	tons	900
Dry Beans (2004)	4,400	4,300	22.3	cwt.	95,890
Potatoes (2004)	28,500	28,300	428	cwt.	12,112,400

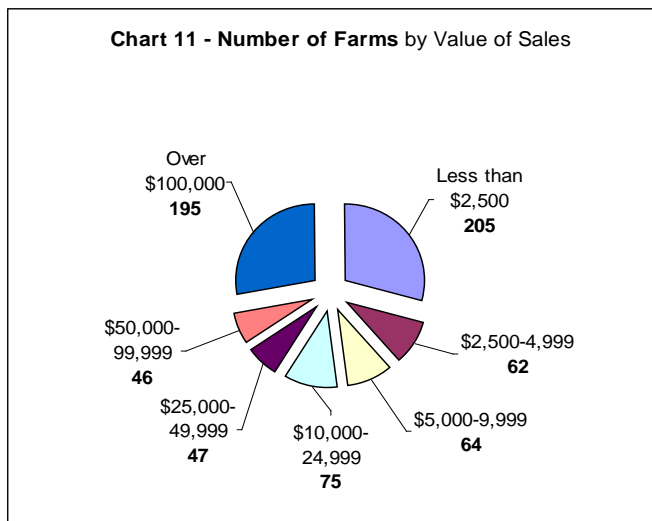
The contribution of Minidoka County farms toward the total crop production for the state of Idaho in each of the crops is as follows: All Wheat – 3%, Barley – 10%, Sugar Beets – 25%, Corn – 2%, Alfalfa hay – 3%, Dry Beans – 6%, and Potatoes – 9%.

The value of that crop production to the Minidoka County economy is enormous. Chart 10 displays the gross value of the crops produced both in terms of individual cash value and as a percentage of the total crop production.



It can be observed that two major row crops, namely potatoes and sugar beets account for two thirds of the total crops value for 2004.

The next chart, Chart 11, looks at the production of farm products based on the value of sales per farm.



It shows that nearly half of the farms in the county had sales of less than \$10,000. The 195 farms with sales of \$100,000 or more would account for the great majority of the crops production in the county even though they make up less than one third of the total counted entities.

## Livestock

The livestock industry is also an important component of the Minidoka County economy. Agricultural statistics for 2005 indicate that there were 39,500 head of cattle in the county. This included 4,500 mature beef cows and 8,900 dairy cows. The balance of 26,100 head was made up of bulls and younger cattle and calves. The total value of these cattle was estimated at just over \$42.5 million.

There were also 45,500 head of sheep in the county in 2005. These animals were valued at slightly more than \$6 million.

The numbers of hogs and other farm animals were not large enough in Minidoka County to be reported by Idaho Ag Statistics. The total value of livestock in the county was estimated at \$48.8 million.

The value of cattle and sheep in the county amounted to 2% and 6% respectively of the total value for the State of Idaho.

The number of livestock animals in the county has been fairly constant over the last five years with the exception of sheep. Chart 12 shows details of the changes. The beef cow and dairy categories are for mature animals that have calved at least once.

