

The Nickerson Family

Here in Dome Valley near Yuma Arizona you can find the Nickerson family farm. They are a 4th generation family farm operating on 5,000 acres. Robert Nickerson's dad, granddad, and great granddad all farmed the land before him. Today, two generations are still working on the farm. An acre is about the size of a football field, which means the Nickerson's have a lot of land and crops to care for. Having a large assortment of crops on the farm, they rely on help from 185 employees to help maintain the day-to-day operations. Because of Arizona's warm climate, the Nickerson's can grow many different crops year-round. Some of their crops include: romaine lettuce, broccoli, cauliflower, spinach, kale, mustard, cabbage, lemons and more. However, having such a large area to farm allows the Nickerson family to not only grow crops for consumption, but also seed crops to help farmers worldwide.



The Nickerson family grows an assortment of seed crops including: Sudan grass, Bermuda hay, alfalfa, okra, onions, lettuce, broccoli, cauliflower, and cilantro. They grow these seed crops for various companies that sell seeds to farmers all over the world.

Growing a seed crop and growing a crop for the store are very different. Generally, a seed crop takes twice as long! This is because only mature plants will begin to produce seeds so they can reproduce before the plant dies. When the plants are ready to produce seeds, they begin to produce flowers that the bees pollinate. The Nickerson's say the bees play a crucial role in the seed crop production. When crops require both male and female plants to reproduce, like with broccoli, the bees pollinate each plant allowing them to produce seeds.



When the Nickerson's harvest the seed crop, the process is also very different from a regular crop. With their broccoli seed crops, they must go through the field and remove the male plants because they do not contain seeds. Then they walk through the fields with a machete and cut down all the female plants, laying them out to dry in the Arizona sun. After about a week they run the plants through a combine tractor to separate the seeds from the plants. The seeds are then cleaned, bagged, transported and stored so they can be planted for the next year's crop.

