Located some 40 miles east of San Francisco Bay, the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is one of the more distinct and important elements in California's diversely complex agricultural structure. Its outstanding characteristic is the great triangular mantle of highly organic soil - one of the world's larger and more productive deposits of sea-level, tule-reed peat. This deposit extends from a point near Antioch, northward toward Sacramento, eastward to Stockton, and southward to the vicinity of Tracy. It has a total extent of some 250,000 acres and an average depth of 18 feet. A maximum depth, slightly in excess of 20 feet, occurs at the western apex of the body.

The climate is characterized by cool, rainy winters and hot, dry summers. The mean annual temperature for a 50-year period is 62°F, with recorded maximum and minimum of 112° and 21°, respectively. Average annual rainfall is about 15 inches, with the driest year having only 5 inches and the wettest slightly more than 20 inches. Despite the limited precipitation, atmospheric humidity is commonly high due to the large bodies of open water and the prevalence of summer fogs. Damaging frosts are relatively infrequent; the growing season is some 300 days in length.

Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers, together with their numerous tributaries and distributaries, interlace the delta and divide it into more than 100 inter-fluvial units, or "islands". The interiors of these are at sea level, or below, with the water level in adjacent channels at a higher elevation. Surrounding each island and giving it a saucer-like relief, is an elevated stream-built ridge of mineral alluvium.

By means of strong protective levees along these encircling ridges, and by adequately developed drainage and irrigation systems, practically the entire quarter million acres have been brought under cultivation. Asparagus, great plows, planters, cultivators, other implements.

Yields are high, world record productions of potatoes and other crops frequent. During the past 10 years, agricultural products of the delta had an average annual value of $20,000,000 or more than $100 per acre for the entire area involved.

The chief hazards to a long, uninterrupted enjoyment of the present highly profitable agriculture include; 1. stability of the levee systems, 2. alkali concentrations, 3. plant diseases and pests, and 4. FIRE.

Without unduly minimizing the seriousness of the other factors, it is fire which constitutes the greatest single threat. Levees can be strengthened or even rebuilt in case of breach. Toxic amounts of salt can be prevented from occurring, or lands so damaged readily be reclaimed. Plant diseases and pests can be combattled, if not eliminated, by methods already developed. Fire however, like wind and erosion in the case of mineral soils, is a destroyer. Once destroyed by fire there is no way to restore these valuable organic deposits.

Fire in the delta is of two kinds. 1. The accidental conflagrations are spectacular enough to be front page news, and 2. The "cultural burning" is a well-established farming practice in the delta which is too common to consternation. Cultural burning is a general practice among tenant farmers, and many of the more intelligent owners indulge in this insidious procedure. Insidious, because each burning lowers the land level 1 to more than 6 inches, and in time will result in complete destruction of the valuable organic mantle, produce untold difficulty in drainage and in irrigation, and lead to a concentration of salt and other evils.

Losses due to fire are very real, and not imaginary or theoretical.