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As in other agricultural states, farming in Idaho underwent a postwar transformation that enabled a smaller labor force to produce larger crops. Increased dependence upon seasonal migrant labor had wartime antecedents that reflected economic needs to depend upon improved technology, equipment, chemical fertilizers and weed killers, and superior seeds and crops. Farms were mechanized into outdoor factories with large capital investment in land and equipment. Fewer migrant workers were required to maintain farm production as new machines took over a greater variety of jobs. A substantial increase in irrigated acreage, made possible by pumping water to areas previously unserved by canals, employed more farmers and field workers than otherwise could have been accommodated. Small family farms were consolidated or displaced by large corporate enterprises, and even family farms often were incorporated to provide access to capital, and business and tax benefits. Large ranches with range cattle and sheep herds continued to operate, but feed lots were held for a growing number of livestock.

Specialty crops--some well established, such as potatoes, beans, and sugar beets, and other newer, such as hybrid corn seed, or alfalfa and clover seed, and mint or rape--became increasingly important on irrigated tracts. Many Palouse farms that had primarily yielded grain in earlier years began to specialize in dry peas and other commodities. Highly sophisticated planning and scientific control of production processes made more advanced types of farming as technical a procedure as computer manufacturing or lead-silver mining. Marketing difficulties and erratic price levels continued to remind farmers of their earlier experience with agricultural surplus and their need for commodity controls similar to those of other, more manageable business pursuits. Agriculture continued as Idaho's primary economic activity, but field crops and agricultural industry were transformed almost beyond recognition in many respects. A great deal of hard labor remained necessary, but farm workers often moved irrigation pipe rather than dig ditches. Farmers still were lucky, though, when they were operating at a profit rather than a loss.

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