



# Cultivating Science, Harvesting Power: Science and Industrial Agriculture in California (Inside Technology)

*Christopher R. Henke*

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Just south of San Francisco lies California's Salinas Valley, the heart of a multi-billion dollar agricultural industry that dominates U. S. vegetable production. How did the sleepy valley described in the stories of John Steinbeck become the nation's "salad bowl"? In *Cultivating Science, Harvesting Power*, Christopher R. Henke explores the ways that science helped build the Salinas Valley and California's broader farm industry. Henke focuses on the case of University of California "farm advisors," scientists stationed in counties throughout the state who have stepped forward to help growers deal with crises ranging from labor shortages to plagues of insects. These disruptions in what Henke terms industrial agriculture's "ecology of power" provide a window onto how agricultural scientists and growers have collaborated--and struggled---in shaping this industry. Through these interventions, Henke argues, science has served as a mechanism of repair for industrial agriculture. Basing his analysis on detailed ethnographic and historical research, Henke examines the history of state-sponsored farm advising--in particular, its roots in Progressive Era politics--and looks at both past and present practices by farm advisors in the Salinas Valley. He goes on to examine specific examples, including the resolution of a farm labor crisis during World War II at the Spreckels Sugar Company, the use of field trials for promoting new farming practices, and farm advisors' and growers' responses to environmental issues. Beyond this, Henke argues that the concept of repair is broadly applicable to other cases and that expertise can be deployed more generally to encourage change for the future of American agriculture.



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