MINIATURE LETTUCE

- In 2007, Yuma producers grew over 88,000 acres of lettuce valued at over $720 million. Leaf lettuce is the 3rd ranking leafy green crop grown in the county, based on gross farm gate receipts.

- Salad eaters have more to choose from than iceberg and romaine lettuce. Restaurants and some grocery stores are highlighting the vast lettuce offerings. They are now featuring some of the most beautiful and delicious lettuces grown today.

- In addition to prepackaged salad choices, consumers now have the option of finding miniature lettuce. Commonly found in a combination pack with 2 varieties of petite heads, these multicolored lettuces are packaged directly from the field. Size and shape allows for quick and easy preparation, and flexibility in size and cuts.

- By packing multiple heads into a single package, seasonal lettuce blends can provide consumers with a wide variety of lettuce choices. Many feel that packaged mini lettuce heads can add variety and be a fresh alternative to processed salad mixes.

- The size and shape of smaller lettuce head and leaf varieties allow for quick and easy preparation, and flexibility in serving quantity. Some consumers like the idea of having multiple lettuce in small sizes as a new and fresh idea in leafy green production.

- Most of Yuma’s leaf lettuce is shipped by refrigerated truck to markets throughout the US and Canada.

- In the 1970’s, salad became a national obsession as salad bars sprung up everywhere. Along with increased interest in salad came widening choices of ingredients and more variety in salad dressings. Tuned-in restaurants served salads and sandwiches bulging with alfalfa sprouts and avocados, perhaps the two ingredients most identified with salads at that time. The 1990’s initiated the decade of convenience, with the emergence of the grocery store "salad mix," pre-cut, pre-washed greens for an easy mixed green salad.

- Lettuce is one of the most common cool season vegetables and is a close relative of sunflowers, artichoke, chicory, endive and sunflowers.

- Americans eat about 30 pounds of lettuce every year. That’s about five times more than what we ate in the early 1900s.

- The ancient Greeks believed that lettuce induced sleep, so they served it at the end of the meal. The Romans continued the custom. However, the dictatorial Emperor Domitian (81-96 AD) served it at the beginning of his feasts, so he could torture his guests by forcing them to stay awake in the presence of the Emperor.

- The lettuce that we see today, actually started out as a weed around the Mediterranean basin. Served in dishes for more than 4500 years, lettuce has certainly made its mark in his-
Lettuce was introduced to the New World from Europe, as early as 1494.

- Thomas Jefferson had 19 varieties of lettuce growing in his garden at Monticello.

- Iceberg lettuce got its name from the fact that California growers started shipped it covered with heaps of crushed ice in the 1920s. It had previously been called Crisphead lettuce.

- Lettuce is a vegetable that is pretty much immune to any form of preservation. You can’t freeze it, can it, dry it, or pickle it.

- While accumulating a worldwide gene pool of lettuces, the USDA found red, yellow varieties, and blue-green varieties of lettuce.

- The expression 'rabbit food' referring to lettuce, was first recorded in the 1930s.

- Spinach and other green leafy vegetables are nutritious because they contain high levels of lutein which helps give the skin its essential antioxidant mechanism by maintaining skin hydration and elasticity.

Kurt Nolte is an area agriculture agent with the Yuma County Cooperative Extension. He can be reached at 928-726-3904.