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Strawberries are harvested at Rod Koda's farm along San Andreas Road in Watsonville.

# Strawberries remain county's top crop despite decline

*Agriculture*

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Raspberries command record prices in 2008

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WATSONVILLE — With both acreage and prices down in 2008, the value of Santa Cruz County's strawberry crop plunged \$36 million, or nearly 37 percent, compared to 2007.

Raspberries, an increasingly popular crop among growers and

consumers, made up most of the difference, posting a gain of \$35 million, a 50 percent increase over 2007.

But strawberries still reign as the top crop, accounting for \$160 million of last year's \$485 million total agricultural production, according to the newly released

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The amount of strawberries grown in the Pajaro Valley decreased last year.

## CROPS

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2008 Santa Cruz County Crop Report. No one expects raspberries to grab the crown.

"Strawberries fuel the industry," said John Eiskamp, a raspberry grower and president of the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau. "Raspberries depend on that to move product."

Eiskamp said strawberries are driven in the trucks that then carry raspberries to market as well. At the end of the raspberry season, which extends past that of strawberries, transportation can be a challenge.

At the same time, raspberries, along with other

2008 TOP CROPS	
Strawberries	\$160.3M
Raspberries	\$105.8M
Misc. vegetables	\$39M
Indoor cut flowers	\$36.2M
Landscape plants	\$30.1M
Misc. berries	\$21M
Other plants*	\$18.4M
Field flowers	\$16.8M
Apples	\$10.1M
Livestock	\$8.1M
*Farm stock and Christmas trees	
SOURCE: Santa Cruz County Agriculture Commissioner	

caneberries, add value to strawberries because buyers have a one-stop shop in the Pajaro Valley.

Eiskamp, a Driscoll's grower, said that's why the company has promoted a "berry patch" theme.

"We work hand in hand with strawberry growers," Eiskamp said.

Strawberry growers planted about 10 percent fewer acres and, though they produced more per acre, overall production fell. So did prices, which while down from 2007 were still higher than most of the previous six years.

Raspberry growers, on the other hand, saw prices rise to record levels at nearly \$5,500 a ton.

Strawberry growers said acreage in production varies from year to year as farmers rotate land between Santa Cruz and Monterey counties, and, according to the California

Strawberry Commission, regional strawberry acreage was up in 2008.

The crop report, produced annually by the county agriculture commissioner, noted a slight dip in overall crop value in 2008, but several crops produced more dollars, including raspberries; apples, up 20 percent thanks to higher production on fewer acres; and broccoli, where higher prices tripled the value of the crop.

Miscellaneous berries, a category that includes blackberries, ollalieberries, currants and blueberries, climbed from \$14 million to \$21 million.

Cut flowers, leaf lettuce, timber and livestock also posted modest gains, while most nursery products and vegetables brought in fewer dollars.