

Crops brought in \$414 million in '06

Agriculture

Recently released crop report shows a \$4 million drop over previous year's bounty

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Strawberries remain the No. 1 cash crop in Santa Cruz County, accounting for \$154 million in gross sales in 2006, followed by raspberries, then apples, according to the annual Crop and Livestock Report released recently by the county Agricultural Commissioner's Office.

In all, the county's crops, from lettuce to wine grapes to berries, brought in a total \$414 million in 2006, a slight decrease from the \$418 million in 2005, Ken Corbishley, the county's agricultural commissioner, said Tuesday.

Raspberries fetched \$83.6 million while apples brought in \$10.6 million during 2006. Other top crops included landscape plants at \$35.1 million, miscellaneous vegetables, \$28 million and indoor cut flowers, \$15.4 million.

"We're still trying to figure out why we had a decrease," Corbishley said. "We have a feeling it may have just been an error in reporting the year before."

Each year, the county ag office con-



Jeff Martinez of Cal Giant in Watsonville loads pallets of strawberries into a semi-trailer.

Kate Falconer/
Sentinel file

County Crop Report

	2006	2005
Strawberries:	\$154.3M	\$126.7M
Raspberries:	\$83.7M	\$112.4M
Apples:	\$10.3M	\$11.9M
Cut flowers:	\$15.4M	\$14.3M
Wine grapes:	\$4.3M	\$1.8M

report last week.

While Santa Cruz County has consistently ranked in the top 20 counties in the state in gross sales, there's no question that the numbers are on the decline.

In 2004, for example, the county's crops accounted for a record \$448 million, but since then there has been a steady decrease, most of which has been attributed to either bad weather, skyrocketing costs of diesel fuel or health scares such as the E. coli outbreak last year that killed three people and sickened nearly 200 others across the country.

ducts a report and asks growers to list their gross sales, their acreage, their yield and the price per ton at the farm gate. There are roughly 400 growers in the county with a little more than 26,000 acres in the county.

Corbishley said the millions of dollars in sales, however, do not include the cost of doing business, such as paying for fuel,

labor, packaging, pest control and transportation.

"Production values remain high in Santa Cruz County because of exceptionally fertile soil, a climate that allows for year round production and high value crops," Corbishley wrote in a report to the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors, which took its first look at the

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