

# ✓ Crop value in county up slightly

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WATSONVILLE — The value of strawberries grown in Santa Cruz County dropped in 1994 — for the first time in quite a while — but gains in vegetables and timber led to a harvest worth almost \$247 million, up just slightly from last year.

## ■ Coming Saturday: weekly ag report

Strawberry production totaled \$93.6 million, according to the 1994 crop report released Thursday, about \$10.8 million less than the previous year. The county's top crop was worth more per ton, but 147 fewer acres were planted — down from 3,256 acres — and fewer tons were produced per acre. Dave Riggs, executive director of the California Strawberry Commission, said he was surprised to see the decrease in Santa Cruz, since overall, the strawberry gross in the Watsonville-Salinas growing region was up 10 percent for 1994.

"We've been at a high level of production for a number of years," Riggs said. "Whether we've plateaued or not, I don't know ... but I think we've hit a mark we'll stay at for awhile."

Although Riggs hasn't yet analyzed the figures, he suggested the drop might result from more farmers harvesting strawberry plants for a second year, which then typically produce lower yields. About 90 percent of the strawberry crop is replanted each year, but some farmers harvest plants a second year to save money.

Moreover, 1993's strawberry gross was \$104.5 million, a 30 percent increase over the prior year.

Iceberg lettuce ranked second on the list of top crops, edging ahead of raspberries, up \$5.2 million to \$23.8 million to take third place. With 1,128 acres, raspberries covered more ground than ever in 1994, but the value per ton dropped by \$486.

Cut roses, which ranked fourth, and carnations were among the nursery crops losing ground to competition from imports from Colombia, Ecuador and other Latin American countries.

Rose prices dropped a penny to 26 cents a

## Million-dollar crops

Strawberries remain the county's top agricultural crop, according to the 1994 crop report, although their value fell after topping \$100 million in 1993.

Some other trends: Timber harvest grew dramatically while mushroom production shrank after a major grower shut down. Nursery sales grew, but cut flower production declined because of foreign imports.

Crop	1994 value	Change from '93
Strawberries	\$93.7 million	Down
Iceberg lettuce	\$24.5 million	Up
Raspberries	\$23.8 million	Up
Roses	\$18.6 million	Down
Timber	\$12.6 million	Up
Apples	\$8.7 million	Down
Lettuce, leaf	\$8.0 million	Up
Field flowers	\$7.7 million	Up
Brussels sprouts	\$7.6 million	Down
Landscape plants	\$6.5 million	Up
Celery	\$4.0 million	Up
Cauliflower	\$3.2 million	Up
Bushberries	\$2.6 million	Up
Artichokes	\$1.9 million	Up
Sweetheart roses	\$1.8 million	Down
Indoor pots	\$1.7 million	Down
Miniature carnations	\$1.1 million	Down
Total	\$246.8 million	Up

flower. In all, roses grossed \$18.5 million in 1994, or \$1.2 million less than in 1993, though yields remained the same.

Carnations likewise were hit by foreign competition. Only half the standard-sized flowers grown in 1993 were grown in 1994, and total gross was cut by more than half to \$857,000. Miniature carnation yields also declined, but because value per bunch was better, the gross shrank by only \$147,000.

It was a good year for vegetable and timber crops, though.

Higher prices for timber statewide helped double its value to \$12.5 million for fifth place.

"More property owners decided this is a good year to harvest," said Janet Webb, a forester in the sales division of Big Creek Lumber. "Sometimes they'll have it sitting there 10 or 20 years ... they probably won't be doing it again for another 20 years."

In the \$58.7 million vegetable industry, growth in leaf lettuce, celery and cauliflower amounted to a nearly \$5 million increase. Meanwhile, the county's \$8.1 million mushroom industry ground to a halt last year with the shutdown of Matthew & Son's Mushrooms in the Watsonville area.