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Farmworkers pick strawberries Wednesday in a Sun Valley Berries field in Watsonville.

# COUNTY CROP VALUE HITS RECORD \$532 MILLION

STRAWBERRIES FUEL INCREASE; VEGETABLE, FLOWER  
AND APPLE CROP VALUES ALSO JUMPED IN 2010

Agriculture

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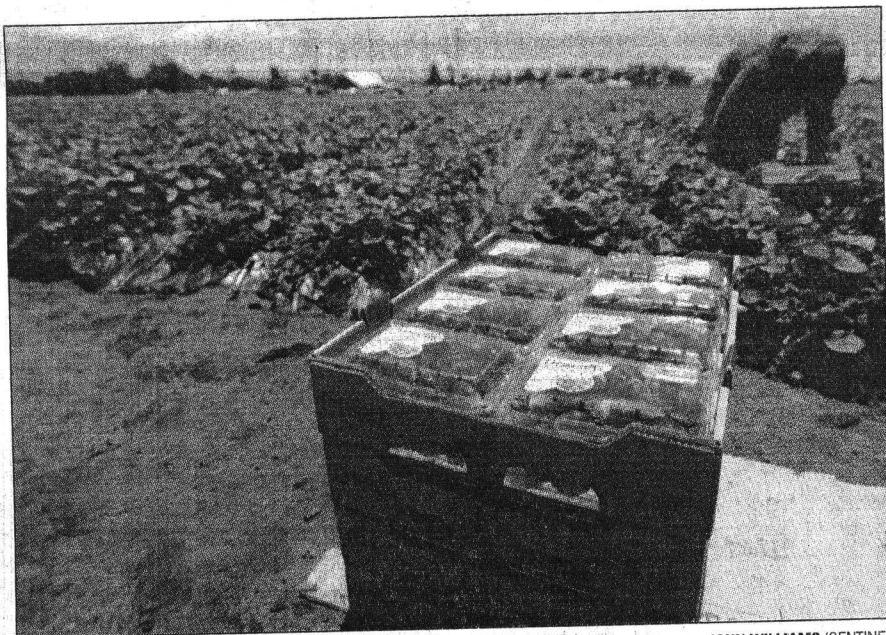
WATSONVILLE — Santa Cruz County growers broke the \$500 million mark for crop value in 2010 with strawberries leading the way.

The top crop for many years, strawberries grew in acreage and tons per acre in 2010 over the previous year, according to the annual county crop report, released Tuesday.

Total crop value was a record \$532.5 million, up from \$492 million in 2009, the report says. Strawberries counted for nearly \$200 million of the total.

By comparison, Monterey County crop values slipped less than 1 percent in 2010 after a 5 percent increase a year earlier. Strawberries, which passed leaf lettuce as the No. 1 crop a year ago, remained in the lead, as the two crops had slight declines.

Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner Eric Lauritzen pegged the



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Boxes full of freshly picked strawberries sit next to a Sun Valley Berries field on Wednesday.

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Strawberries accounted for nearly \$200 million of 2010's \$532 million crop value.

## SANTA CRUZ COUNTY TOP CROPS

	ACRES	VALUE
Strawberries	3,317	\$197.2 million
Raspberries	2,033	\$91.7 million
Miscellaneous vegetables*	3,955	\$38.4 million
Indoor cut flowers	160	\$37.4 million
Field grown flowers	331	\$34.9 million

\* Includes more than two dozen crops, but excludes Brussels sprouts, \$7.5 million, and leaf and head lettuce, \$16 million.

SOURCE: 2010 Santa Cruz County Crop Report, [www.agdept.com](http://www.agdept.com)





A worker at Sun Valley Berries carries a full pallet of strawberries through the fields during harvest on Wednesday. JOHN WILLIAMS/SENTINEL

## CROPS

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county's gross production value at slightly more than \$4 billion. Monterey County is the state's top ag producer.

"Actually, strawberries are responsible for \$25 million of the \$40 million increase," said Mary Lou Nicoletti, acting Santa Cruz County agricultural commissioner.

Growers more than made up for a \$7 per ton drop in strawberry prices with a 9 percent increase in tons per acre. Strawberries also were planted on 3,317 acres, up 144 acres from 2009.

Weather and varieties are the main production factors, said Jodi Reinman, a spokeswoman for the California Strawberry Commission.

Despite late rains this year, including a half-inch or more in some parts of the Pajaro Valley on Tuesday, Reinman said no one's too worried. She couldn't project how this year would compare to last. But she

provided statistics showing year-to-date totals in the Watsonville/Salinas are about a third of last year's total harvest of more than 1 billion pounds of strawberries in the region.

Rogelio Ponce of Sun Valley Berries said some of his fields were soaked by Tuesday's rain, meaning he might not have fresh berries going to into the Fourth of July weekend. Rain followed by a warm day can crack berries, making them unsuitable for the fresh market, he said.

"The rain didn't help," Ponce said. "We were three weeks late from the start, and that put a lot of guys back. We were just gaining momentum."

Raspberries held onto the No. 2 spot in 2010, though sinking \$12.5 million in value to \$91.7 million. Though prices rose more than \$1,000 a ton to \$5,287, production per acre declined by more than a third.

Grower John Eiskamp said raspberries got off to a slow start last year, and late rains, pollination issues and a cool

summer all affected production.

"Yields at least for me weren't off by a wide margin if at all," Eiskamp said.

The blackberry crop, for the first time pulled out of a catch-all category that also includes boysenberries, blueberries, currants and ollalieberries, posted \$34 million in value.

Other increases were in apples, nearly doubling in value to more than \$13 million thanks to stronger production and pricing. Acreage, which has been declining for years, dipped again.

A 40 percent jump in the value of field grown flowers offset declines in other crops in the \$119 million nursery sector, growing 40 percent to \$35 million.

The value of vegetables also posted strong growth, climbing to nearly \$62 million from \$47 million the prior year despite declines in Brussels sprouts and head lettuce.

Nicoletti said the values in the crop report are for gross production and don't reflect profit or losses.