

# Agriculture Strawberry crop drops on paper

■ **Pajaro Valley:** A report shows lower production, but an official says it reflects more accurate reporting of acreage.

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Although official statistics indicate the value of strawberries grown in the Pajaro Valley declined dramatically between 1993 and 1994, a farm expert says the most-recent figures more accurately reflect actual production in the fertile fields of north Monterey County and southern Santa Cruz County.

The 1994 Pajaro Valley crop report, prepared by agricultural

commissioners in both counties, shows a 10 percent drop in overall farm income in the valley in 1994. The biggest single decrease was in strawberries, where the gross income reported fell from more than \$240.5 million in 1993 to just over \$206 million last year.

But, noted the assistant Monterey County agricultural commissioner stationed in the community of Pajaro, the 1993 figure did not accurately portray actual

strawberry production in the valley bisected by the Pajaro River. Instead, said Charlie Núñez, Monterey County growers had been reporting their production countywide instead of from the Pajaro Valley only.

"About 1,500 acres of strawberries that had been listed in the Pajaro Valley crop report were actually in the Salinas Valley," noted Núñez. "The 1994 numbers are what actually came out of the Pajaro Valley."

As usual, strawberries were the biggest money crop in the Pajaro Valley last year. Gross farm receipts in the valley were about \$467.3 million, including the \$206 million collected by strawberry growers.

That total is down approximately 10 percent from 1993. Núñez said most of that decline, aside from the rejiggering of the numbers on the strawberry fields, is part of the normal fluctuation of income in the volatile world of agriculture.

Head lettuce, the old staple of central coast row crops, was the second-biggest crop. Various forms of iceberg lettuce brought Pajaro Valley growers almost \$47 million in 1994, up \$5 million from the previous year.

Mushrooms were third in dollar value, bringing Pajaro Valley growers about \$46.5 million last year. That figure was down more than \$5 million from 1993.

Experts are quick to note that the 1995 crop report, which won't be out for another year, will reflect losses from the disastrous floods that inundated the Pajaro Valley last March. The waters wiped out much of the region's strawberry crop for the entire year and set growers of other crops, such as lettuce and cauliflower, back at least one harvest.

"By last year at this time, growers in Monterey and Santa Cruz counties had shipped more than 43 million crates of strawberries," said Teresa Thorne, spokeswoman for the California Strawberry Commission. "But as of now, 1995 figures show they've shipped fewer than 37 million crates."