

Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau Ask Laura Column
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Q: How much does it cost to produce berries and vegetables along the Central Coast?

A: The timing of your question is excellent. Through a collaboration of UC Cooperative Extension farm advisors, UC Davis researchers and specialists, and local growers and industry, we recently completed three new cost and return studies. They are: strawberries for the 2016 growing season, and iceberg lettuce and broccoli for the 2017 growing season. The studies are available to view or download from our office's website, <http://cesantacruz.ucanr.edu>, and through the Agricultural Issues Center / Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics at UC Davis, <https://coststudies.ucdavis.edu>.

The studies are an in-depth evaluation of the estimated growing and harvest costs for each crop. Each study contains a narrative that describes how the costs were calculated and a series of tables that include costs per acre for land preparation, fertilization and pest management practices, material inputs, labor, business overhead and investments, along with harvest practices and costs. The studies also have what we call a "ranging analysis", which shows potential net returns per acre for a variety of different yield and price combinations. Also included are estimated costs for food safety and regulatory (air and water quality) programs for each crop.

New for these studies: an expanded discussion about labor, including two tables that show the 2016 to 2022 phase-in schedules for the new minimum wage and overtime laws in agriculture.

And we are pleased to report that the 2016 strawberry cost and return study is now available in Spanish, *Muestra de costos para producir y cosechar fresas*.

If you are not currently producing one of these crops, the studies can help you decide if they might be a good "fit" for your farming operation. If the crops are part of your current farm plan, they can help you project cash flow, manage finances, consider risk, and determine when or if production loans may be necessary for your operation. The ranging analysis can also help you understand the potential profitability of each crop.

At our UC Cooperative Extension offices in Watsonville (for Santa Cruz County) and Salinas (for Monterey County) we work on a number of different studies that estimate growing and harvest costs, along with potential net returns, for area farmers and industry. The most recent studies for vegetables, berries, and other crops – in our area and for other areas in the state – are updated periodically, and can always be accessed via the above websites. If you have any other questions, would like more information, or would like a print copy of the studies, please let us know.