

Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau Ask Laura Column June 2019 (printed July 2019)
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Q: Can you tell me a bit more about the new census of agriculture?

A: The U.S. Department of Agriculture performs a census of agriculture every five years. It is an enormous undertaking, which would not be possible without the participation of farmers across the U.S., including farmers in California and Santa Cruz County. Results from the most recent 2017 Census of Agriculture were recently published*. Here is some information about Santa Cruz County specifically.

- There were a total of 625 farms in Santa Cruz County, a small decline in the number since the last census in 2012.
- There were 63,900 acres of land in farms. Of that land, 39 percent was in pastureland, 37 percent in cropland, 16 percent in woodland, and 8 percent shown as “other”.
- The average size of a farm in Santa Cruz County was 102 acres, smaller than in the previous census.
- Top crops by acreage were vegetables (all), berries, notably strawberries, lettuce, and broccoli.
- Market value of products sold was \$606.5 million, a slight increase since the last census.
- Crops accounted for 99 percent of total agricultural product sales, with fruits and vegetables by far the largest share of those sales.
- Santa Cruz County crop sales ranked 17th for all reporting counties in California and 24th for all counties reporting in the U.S.
- Total farm production expenses have increased 14 percent since the last census, and total net farm income declined by 18 percent. Similar statistics are seen in per farm averages.
- Most farms – 45 percent of the total – were less than 10 acres in size. Another 36 percent were less than 50 acres. Only a small number – 4 percent – were larger than 500 acres.
- Of all farms, 93 percent are family farms, 85 percent have access to the internet, 22 percent sell their products directly to consumers, and 18 percent farm organically.

This is just a small sampling of all the information that is contained in the 2017 Census of Agriculture. We should all thank the farmers who participated in the census because, while time consuming for them, this information is extremely valuable for support businesses, for researchers, for policy makers, and for all us that are interested in agriculture more broadly.

Please feel free to contact our office for more information or any other questions you may have.

* More details and information can be found at:

<https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/index.php>