

Cochise County, AZ

Arizona County Agricultural Economy Profiles
University of Arizona Cooperative Extension

Overview

Cochise County is located in Arizona’s southeast corner bordered to the east by New Mexico and to the south by Mexico. As of 2022 the population was 125,663 with more than one-third of the county’s population residing in rural areas. Major population centers include Sierra Vista, Douglas, Bisbee, Benson, and Willcox.

Historically a mining and ranching region, today top industries in Cochise County include agriculture and tourism. The county is home to Fort Huachuca, an Army installation, and a rapidly growing tree nut and winery industry, supporting agritourism in the region.

Although on-farm agriculture accounts for 1% of the county’s GDP, it is responsible for approximately 4% of all private industry jobs, higher than the national and state averages. Agriculture also plays an important role in land management, with 1,618 square miles or one-quarter of Cochise County’s land area in farms. Cochise County accounts for 6.5% of Arizona’s agricultural cash receipts.



Map of Cochise County, Arizona

Indicator	Cochise County	Arizona
Land Area (square miles)	6,165	113,591
Land in Farms (Crops, Grazing) (square miles) (2022)	1,618	39,883
Population (2022)	125,663	7,359,197
Annual Average Population Growth Rate (2010-22)	-0.4%	1.2%
Percent of Population Over 65 (2022)	24.4%	18.8%
Percent Population Rural (2020)	36.8%	10.7%
Total Employment (2022)	33,997	3,075,427
Share Federal, State, & Local Government Employment (2022)	30.0%	13.5%
GDP (2022)	\$5.7 billion	\$475.7 billion
Ag, Forestry, & Hunting GDP (on-farm only) (2022)	\$70.1 million	\$2.6 billion

Industry	Location Quotient
Tree nut farming	40.18
Corn farming	10.34
Water and sewer line and related structures construction	10.19
Water supply and irrigation systems	9.85
Livestock merchant wholesalers	9.37
Facilities support services	6.16
Wineries	4.60
Residential framing contractors	3.58
Motor vehicle towing	3.50
Hardware retailers	3.42

Top 10 Private Industries in Cochise County by Employment LQ, 2022

An economy can be characterized by the industries that make up its “base”. A common way to measure this is with location quotients (LQs), the ratio of a particular industry’s share of employment within a region to the same industry’s share of national employment. An industry with a LQ greater than 1.25 is considered part of the economic base, exporting goods and services and bringing money into the region. LQs also help identify a region’s areas of specialization. Higher LQs indicate greater specialization. Of the top 10 most concentrated private industries in Cochise County, agricultural industries occupy five spots, including tree nut farming, corn farming, water supply and irrigation systems, livestock merchant wholesalers, and wineries. For example, the share of employment in tree nut farming is nearly 40 times the national average. Wineries rank seventh at more than 4 times the national average.

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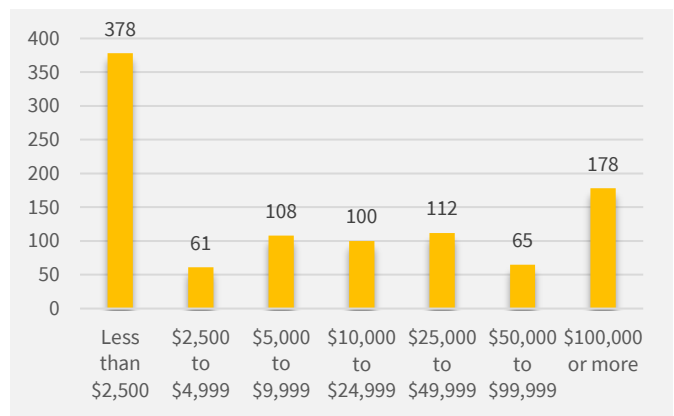
Every 5 years, U.S. Department of Agriculture releases the Census of Agriculture, the most comprehensive source of information on agricultural production by county. The Census provides information on the number of farms, types of crops and livestock produced, and farm characteristics, among other information. A farm is defined as any establishment that produced and sold, or could have sold, \$1,000 or more of agricultural products in the Census year. The following information comes from the most recent 2022 Census of Agriculture.

Farms

There were 1,002 farms in Cochise County in 2022, covering 143,907 acres of cropland (100% of harvested cropland irrigated) and 929,463 acres of pastureland (< 1% irrigated). The average farm size was 1,034 acres, smaller than the state average of 1,528 acres, and the top 13% of farms accounts for 82% of county acreage. Of 1,002 total farms, 378 had less than \$2,500 in sales and 178 farms had more than \$100,000 in sales. The majority of farms in Cochise County were family- or individually-held (76%). Another 9% were partnerships and 10% were family-held corporations.

Farms are classified by the type of agricultural products they produce. When a farm or ranch produces more than one agricultural product, they are classified by the product that constitutes more than 50% of their sales. The most common type of operation in Cochise County is beef cattle ranching and farming (306 farms), followed by fruit and tree nut farming (238 farms), and aquaculture and other animal production (209 farms). While the number of farms is helpful in understanding how many farms “specialize” in different types of agricultural production, it does not reflect the magnitude or scale of production by commodity, which is better captured by sales or cash receipts (next page).

Cochise County Farms by Annual Sales, 2022



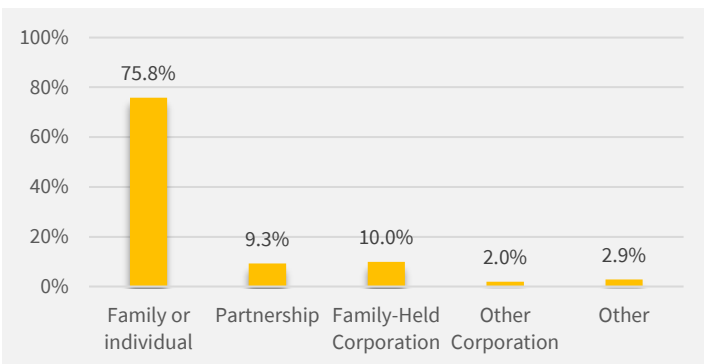
Source: USDA

Cochise County Farms by Industry, 2022

Category	Farms
Total farms	1,002
Oilseed and grain farming	9
Vegetable and melon farming	41
Fruit and tree nut farming	238
Greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture production	19
Other crop farming	84
Cotton farming	5
Sugarcane farming, hay farming, and all other crop farming	79
Beef cattle ranching and farming	306
Cattle feedlots	3
Dairy cattle and milk production	6
Hog and pig farming	12
Poultry and egg production	41
Sheep and goat farming	34
Aquaculture and other animal production	209

Source: USDA

Cochise County Farms by Legal Organization, 2022



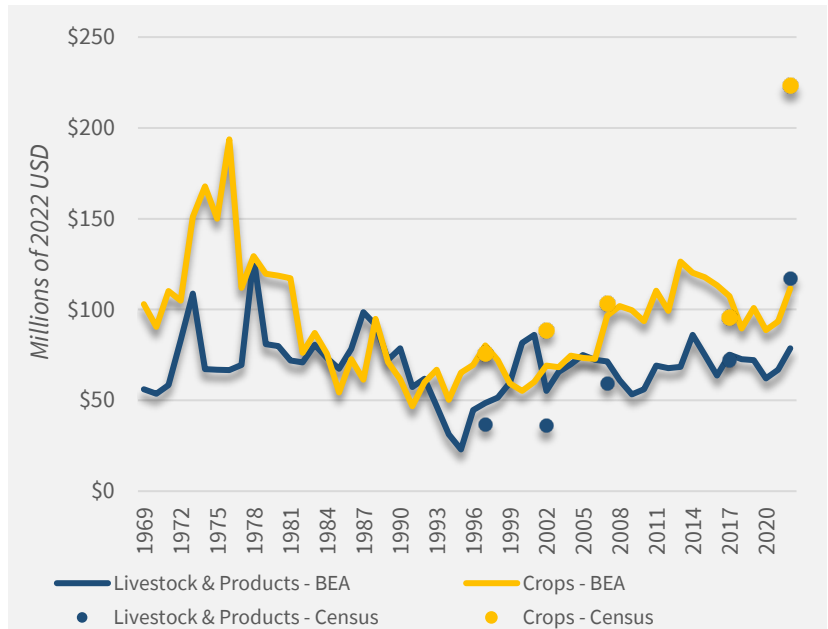
Source: USDA

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Production & Marketing

Cochise County is a crop-dominant county with an estimated two-thirds of cash receipts originating from the sale of crops. The county is major producer of tree nuts, including pecans and pistachios. The county ranked second among U.S. counties in 2022 in terms of its pecan acreage and seventh nationally in terms of its pistachio acreage. Total fruit and tree nut sales, dominated by tree nut sales, approached \$100 million in 2022, a large jump from the previous census when sales totaled just over \$30 million. Since that time significant amounts of new acreage have been planted, and then-non-bearing acreage has since come into production. Meanwhile, total livestock and animal sales for the county were \$117 million.

Cochise County Agricultural Cash Receipts, Crops & Livestock, 1969-2022



Source: USDA & BEA

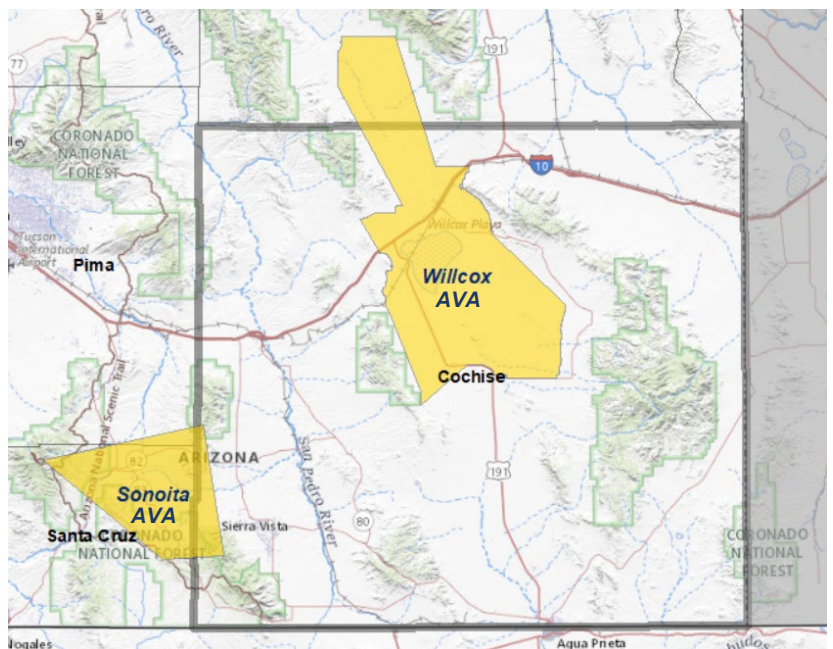
Viticulture & Winemaking

Cochise County is home to two American Viticultural Areas (AVAs), areas designated and recognized as wine grape-growing regions. Both the Willcox and Sonoita AVAs are located partially in Cochise County. As of 2022, Cochise County had 1,076 acres of grape production, accounting for nearly 60% of the state's total acreage, with 64 farms growing grapes. This represents an increase since the 2017 Census. The county produces more wine grapes than it uses and serves as a supplier of Arizona-grown grapes to wineries throughout other parts of the state. Itself a wine tourism destination, Cochise County is home to 28 wineries.

For more information on producing wine in Arizona, please click [here](#) or scan the QR code →



American Viticultural Areas (AVAs) in Cochise County



Cochise County, AZ

Irrigation Water Use

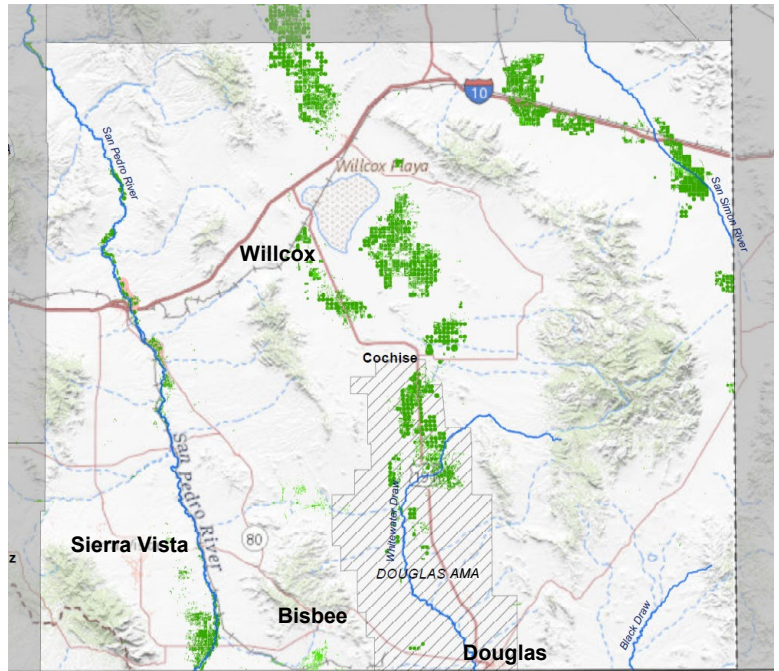
In Arizona, agriculture accounts for about 75% of the state’s water use. More than half of withdrawals for agricultural uses in the state are from surface water. In some areas of the state with high demand, groundwater withdrawals for irrigated agriculture are limited by the 1980 Groundwater Management Act. This legislation established five Active Management Areas (AMA) as well as other Irrigation Non-Expansion Areas (INA) where groundwater pumping and expansion of irrigated agriculture are limited. Cochise County contains the Douglas AMA. Previously designated an INA, the area was transitioned to an AMA in 2022. An AMA has been proposed in the Willcox Basin, but has not been approved by voters.

Cochise County voluntarily requires new developments to provide proof of an adequate 100-year water supply. County-wide, roughly 92% of water is used for irrigation and 8% is used for municipal and domestic uses. Dependence on limited groundwater supplies has been and will continue to be a challenge for agriculture in Cochise County.

For more information on water in Cochise County, please visit the University of Arizona Water Resource Research Center county water factsheets by clicking [here](#) or scanning the QR code →



Cochise County Water Map



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