

Graham County, AZ

Arizona County Agricultural Economy Profiles
University of Arizona Cooperative Extension

Overview

Graham County is located in eastern Arizona bordered to the north by the Black and San Carlos Rivers, to the south by Cochise County, to the east by Greenlee County, and to the west by Gila and Pinal counties. As of 2022 the population was just over 38,000 with more than 52% of the county's population residing in rural areas. The county's population is concentrated in the eastern part of the county in Safford, Pima, and Thatcher.

Top industries in Graham County include government, agriculture, and retail and service-industries. With much of eastern Arizona's population residing in rural areas, the cities and towns of Graham County serve as a primary source for household goods and services. More than 40% of the county's land area is in farms, either crops or grazing. On-farm agriculture directly accounts for less than 1% of county GDP. Graham County accounts for about 1% of Arizona's total agricultural cash receipts.



Map of Graham County, Arizona

Indicator	Graham County	Arizona
Land Area (square miles)	4,623	113,591
Land in Farms (Crops, Grazing) (square miles) (2022)	1,900	39,883
Population (2022)	38,779	7,359,197
Annual Average Population Growth Rate (2010-22)	0.4%	1.2%
Percent of Population Over 65 (2022)	14.5%	18.8%
Percent Population Rural (2020)	52.4%	10.7%
Total Employment (2022)	10,088	3,075,427
Share Federal, State, & Local Government Employment (2022)	29.3%	13.5%
GDP (2022)	\$1.6 billion	\$475.7 billion
Ag, Forestry, & Hunting GDP (on-farm only) (2022)	\$9.7 million	\$2.6 billion

Industry	Location Quotient
Commercial & industrial machinery & equipment (except automotive & electronic) repair & maintenance	8.35
Tire dealers	5.86
Tax preparation services	2.97
Offices of optometrists	2.59
Automotive parts and accessories retailers	2.54
Exterminating and pest control services	2.27
Cut stone and stone product manufacturing	2.06
Residential plumbing and hvac contractors	1.76
Offices of dentists	1.55
Water supply and irrigation systems	1.54

Top 10 Private Industries in Graham 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 industries in Graham County, only water supply and irrigation systems is agriculture-related, with a LQ of 1.54.

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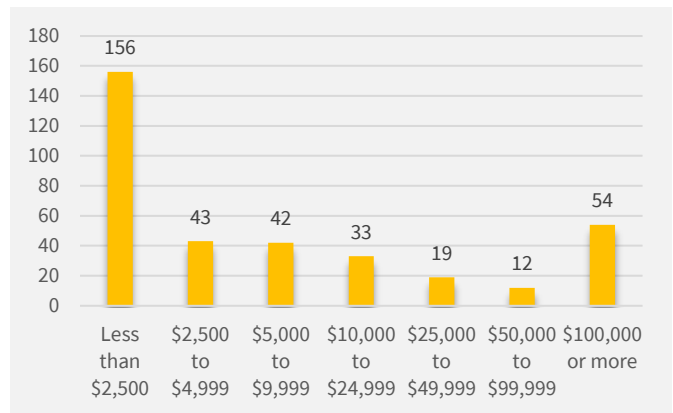
Every 5 years, U.S. Department of Agriculture releases the Census of Agriculture, the most comprehensive source of information on agricultural production by county. The Census provides information on the number of farms, types of crops and livestock produced, and farm characteristics, among other information. 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 359 farms in Graham County in 2022, covering 39,511 acres of cropland (100% of harvested cropland irrigated) and 1,176,381 acres of pastureland (<1% irrigated). The average farm size was 3,387 acres, significantly larger than the state average of 1,528 acres, with the top 5% of farms accounting for 96% of county acreage. Of 359 total farms, 156 had less than \$2,500 in sales and 54 had more than \$100,000 in sales. More than 63% of county farms are family- or individually-held farms, 9% are partnerships, 5% are family-held corporations, and only 0.6% are non-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 Graham County is beef cattle ranching and farming (196 farms), followed by other crop farming (73 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).

Graham County Farms by Annual Sales, 2022



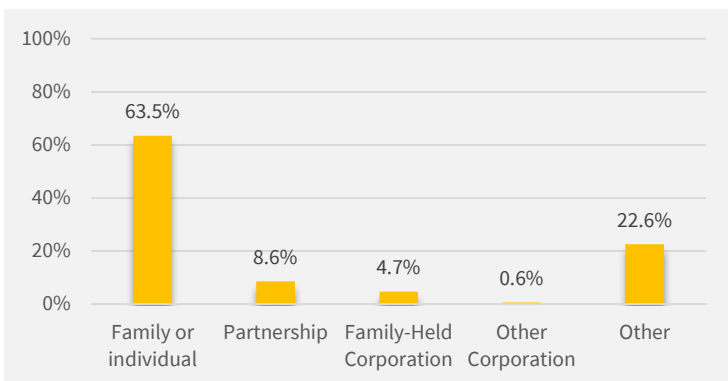
Source: USDA

Graham County Farms by Industry, 2022

Category	Farms
Total farms	359
Oilseed and grain farming	3
Vegetable and melon farming	4
Fruit and tree nut farming	35
Greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture production	3
Other crop farming	73
Cotton farming	17
Sugarcane farming, hay farming, and all other crop farming	56
Beef cattle ranching and farming	196
Cattle feedlots	1
Dairy cattle and milk production	0
Hog and pig farming	9
Poultry and egg production	0
Sheep and goat farming	6
Aquaculture and other animal production	29

Source: USDA

Graham County Farms by Legal Organization, 2022



Source: USDA

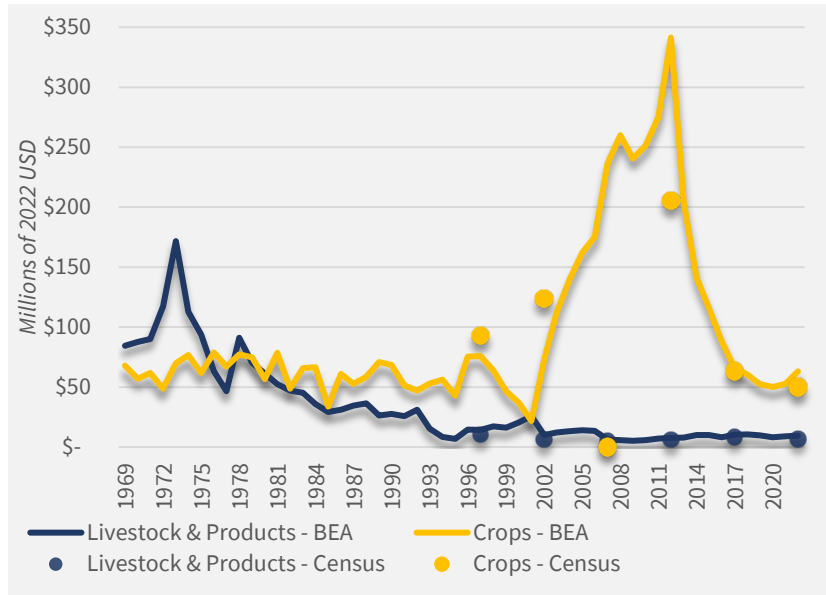
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Production & Marketing

Graham County is a crop-dominant county, with an estimated 88% of county cash receipts originating from sales of crops. Graham County ranks 4th nationally in acres of Pima cotton harvested in 2022, and 5th in terms of bales of Pima cotton produced. Pima cotton is a long-staple variety of cotton valued for its use in textiles. Cotton is the county's top crop in terms of value of production (roughly half of the county's agricultural cash receipts) and the county's relative geographic isolation from other agricultural areas has made it a strategic location for cultivation of Pima cotton which can be more susceptible to pests compared with genetically engineered varieties of Upland cotton. Other top agricultural products in the county include corn, alfalfa hay, and cattle and calves.

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



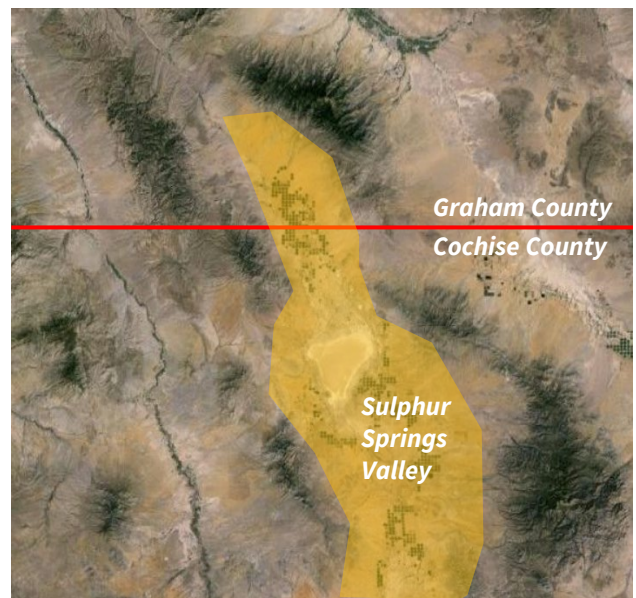
Source: USDA & BEA

Greenhouse Production in the Sulphur Springs Valley

Crop production value in Graham County has seen significant swings over time, most notably between 2002 and 2017. This major spike in the value of crop production in the county was due to construction and operation of a large greenhouse facility in the Sulphur Springs Valley area of Graham County. The Sulphur Springs Valley spans from southwestern Graham County southward into Cochise County and is a major agricultural area of the state. As of 2024, a major producer has announced investment in greenhouse operations in the area, therefore a revival of high value specialty crop production is anticipated within the county in coming years.

The Sulphur Springs Valley is a highly dynamic and productive area of the state, including production of tree nuts, wine grapes, field crops, and greenhouse crops. The area also faces considerable challenges related to its limited groundwater supplies.

Sulphur Springs Valley



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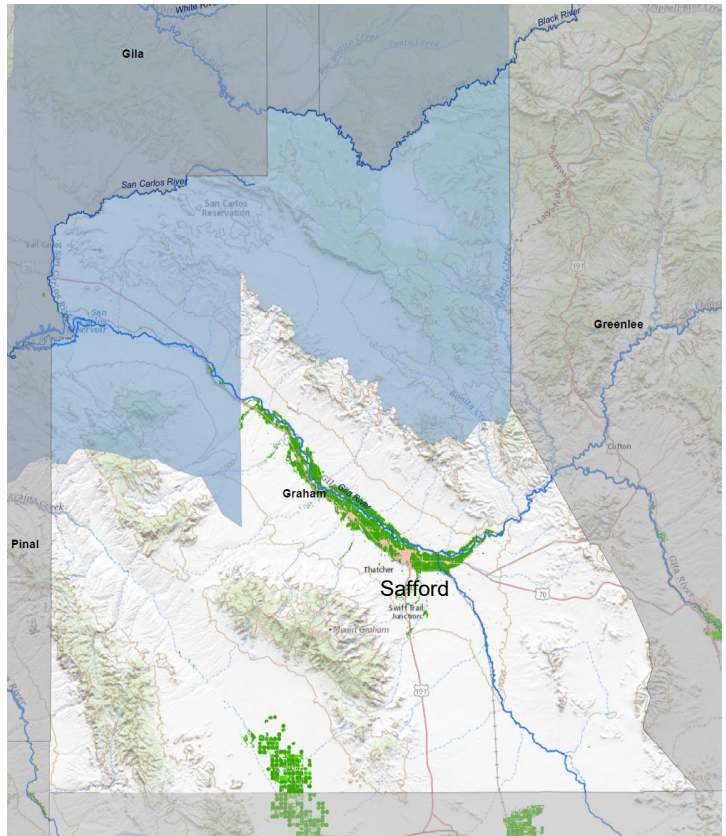
Irrigation Water Use

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. There is no land in Graham County within an AMA or INA, however water sourced from the Gila River is subject to the Globe Equity Decree of 1935, among other water rights settlements, both finalized and ongoing. Agriculture is responsible for 96% of water use in Graham County as of 2015. Water used in agriculture is also closely connected with water used for mining in surrounding areas of the state. In many cases, mining companies have rights to water and may choose to call on those rights at different times, affecting crop plantings in Graham County.

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



Graham County Water Map



About Us

Extension Regional Economic Analysis Program

The Extension Regional Economic Analysis Program (EREAP) conducts applied research and economic analysis addressing economic development issues around Arizona. We work serving the needs of Cooperative Extension and its stakeholders, such as Arizona agricultural and agribusiness industries, natural resource users and organizations, and regional economic groups, to provide specialized analysis and targeted information. For more information or to contact us, please click [here](#) or scan the QR code to visit our site →

