

# Santa Cruz County, AZ

Arizona County Agricultural Economy Profiles  
University of Arizona Cooperative Extension

## Overview

Santa Cruz County is located in southern Arizona bordered to the north by Pima County, to the east by Cochise County, and to the south by Mexico. It is the smallest county in Arizona by land area at 1,237 square miles. Major population centers include Nogales and Rio Rico. Top industries in Santa Cruz County include transportation, wholesale, government, and agriculture. The county is home to a cluster of industries involved in importing, storing, and transporting fresh produce from Mexico. Ranching is prominent within the county, but greenhouse production and viticulture and wine-making are of increasing importance for county agriculture.

On-farm agriculture accounts for a relatively small share (less than 1%) of Santa Cruz County's GDP, but accounts for nearly 4% of private employment, higher than the national and state averages. It also occupies approximately 15% of county land area. Santa Cruz County accounts for less than 1% of Arizona's total agricultural cash receipts.



Map of Santa Cruz County, Arizona

Indicator	Santa Cruz County	Arizona
Land Area (square miles)	1,237	113,591
Land in Farms (Crops, Grazing) (square miles) (2022)	186	39,883
Population (2022)	48,759	7,359,197
Annual Average Population Growth Rate (2010-22)	0.2%	1.2%
Percent of Population Over 65 (2022)	19.5%	18.8%
Percent Population Rural (2020)	59.8%	10.7%
Total Employment (2022)	13,336	3,075,427
Share Federal, State, & Local Government Employment (2022)	27.9%	13.5%
GDP (2022)	\$2.5 billion	\$475.7 billion
Ag, Forestry, & Hunting GDP (on-farm only) (2022)	\$16.3 million	\$2.6 billion

Industry	Location Quotient
Fresh fruit and vegetable merchant wholesalers	162.76
Refrigerated warehousing and storage	32.21
Freight transportation arrangement	18.17
Art dealers	17.68
Postharvest crop activities (except cotton ginning)	15.58
Wineries	9.79
Hardware retailers	4.92
General warehousing and storage	3.17
Department stores	2.81
General freight trucking, local	2.66

*Top 10 Private Industries in Santa Cruz 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. Agricultural industries ranking in the top 10 by LQ include postharvest crop activities (15.58 times more concentrated than the national average) and wineries (9.79). Industries linked with the fresh produce trade also rank highly in the county, for example, fruit and vegetable merchant wholesalers (162.76), refrigerated warehousing and storage (32.21), and freight transportation arrangement (18.17).

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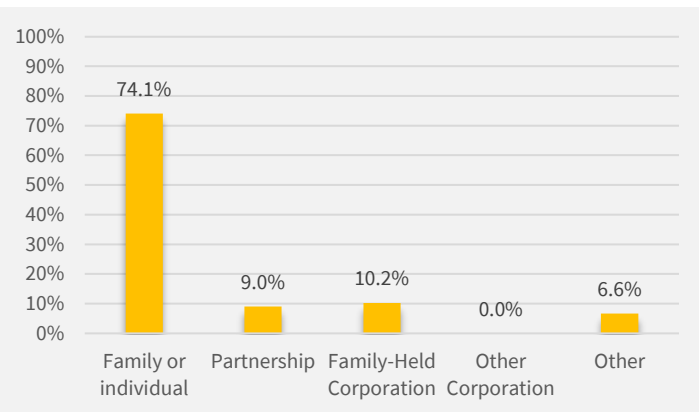
Every 5 years, U.S. Department of Agriculture releases the Census of Agriculture, the most comprehensive source of information on agricultural production by county. The Census provides information on the number of farms, types of crops and livestock produced, and farm characteristics, among other information. 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 166 farms in Santa Cruz County in 2022, covering 3,974 acres of cropland and 115,214 acres of pastureland. The average farm size was 718 acres, significantly smaller than the state average of 1,528 acres. Of 166 total farms, 57 had less than \$2,500 in sales and 18 farms had more than \$100,000 in sales. A large majority of county farms (74%) are family- or individually-held, while 9% are partnerships, 10% are family-held corporations, and 7% have other forms of legal organization.

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 Santa Cruz County is beef cattle ranching and farming (87 farms), followed by aquaculture and other animal production (37 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).

### Santa Cruz County Farms by Legal Organization, 2022



Source: USDA

### Santa Cruz County Farms by Annual Sales, 2022



Source: USDA

### Santa Cruz County Farms by Industry, 2022

Category	Farms
Total farms	166
Oilseed and grain farming	0
Vegetable and melon farming	1
Fruit and tree nut farming	25
Greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture production	7
Other crop farming	5
Cotton farming	0
Sugarcane farming, hay farming, and all other crop farming	5
Beef cattle ranching and farming	87
Cattle feedlots	0
Dairy cattle and milk production	2
Hog and pig farming	0
Poultry and egg production	0
Sheep and goat farming	2
Aquaculture and other animal production	37

Source: USDA

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## Production & Marketing

Santa Cruz County produces roughly equal proportions of agricultural cash receipts through livestock and crops, though historically the county has been livestock-dominant. The county's main livestock commodity is cattle and calves. Though data for 2022 are not disclosed, top crops produced in Santa Cruz County include wine grapes and greenhouse vegetables.

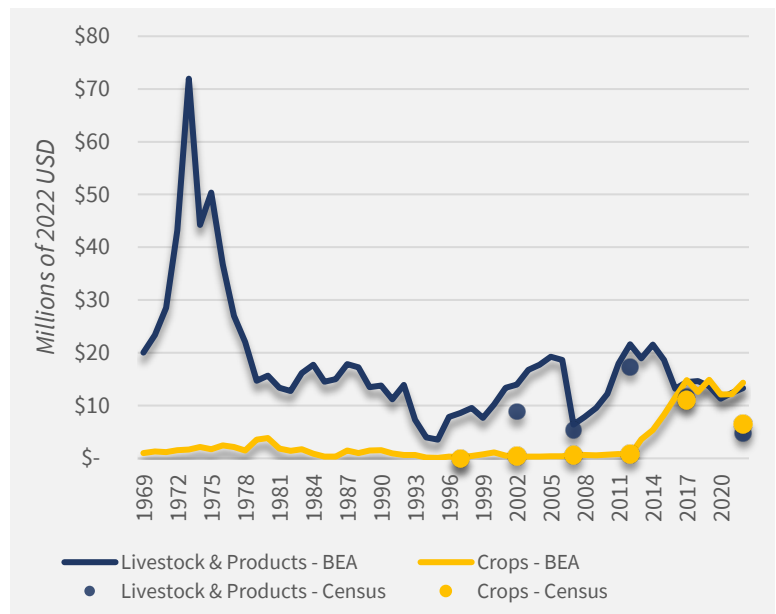
## Fresh Produce Wholesale Industry

The Nogales port of entry, located in Santa Cruz County, is a top port nationally for shipments of fresh fruits and vegetables from Mexico, the U.S.'s largest source of imported fresh produce. Direct employment in fruit and vegetable wholesaling in Santa Cruz County accounts for nearly 1 in 9 private sector jobs in the county. Though employment in the industry has seasonal swings, average annual salaries are over 50% higher than the county average for all private sector jobs. Fresh fruit and vegetable commodities, combined, became the highest-value category of imports through the Nogales port of entry as of 2020 with more than \$3.4 billion in imports, surpassing motor vehicles and vehicle parts as the top category.

For more information on the fresh produce industry in Santa Cruz County, please click [here](#) or scan the QR code



*Santa Cruz County Agricultural Cash Receipts, Crops & Livestock, 1969-2022*

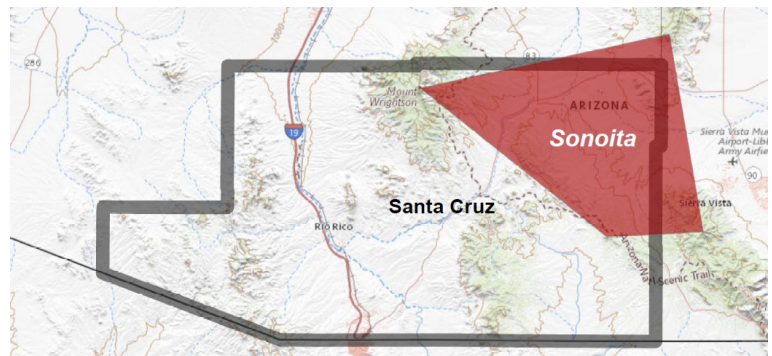


Source: USDA & BEA

## Wineries in Santa Cruz County

Like its neighbor Cochise County, Santa Cruz County has a growing wine industry. The northeastern part of the county is home to the Sonoita American Viticultural Area (AVA). An AVA is an area that has been designated and recognized as a wine grape-growing region. In 2022, the county had 200 acres of grape production by 23 growers. In the same year, there were 21 wineries operating in the county.

*Map of Sonoita AVA*



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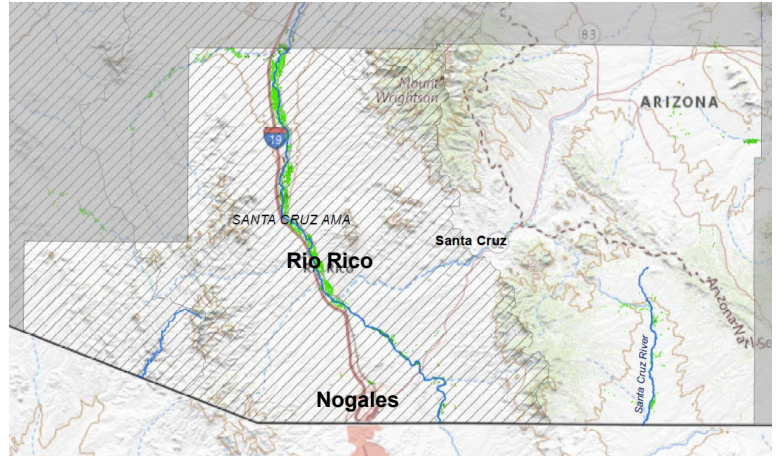
## Irrigation Water Use

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. Santa Cruz County contains portions of the Santa Cruz AMA. Agriculture accounts for roughly 58% of water use within the Santa Cruz AMA. This represents little change since 1985.

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



Santa Cruz County Water Map



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### Extension Regional Economic Analysis Program

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