

**P**rominent agriculture has long defined the history and economy of Ventura County. Over the decades since the mid-nineteenth century, agriculture has been marked by many transitions as various crops fell in and out of favor, and our cities grew.

Ventura County's perfect climate on the coast near, but removed from, a huge metropolitan area means that people and agriculture compete for the same land. With urban population increases driving land values, and global market pressures dictating crop mix, local agriculture has moved production toward the highest value specialty crops such as citrus, avocados, strawberries, and vegetables.

In today's highly urbanized atmosphere, agriculture no longer functions simply as a provider of food and fiber. Agriculture has been given the additional challenges of preserving view-shed and rural quality of life values that have long characterized Ventura County. Expectations of social equity for its workforce, ecological contributions, and environmental sustainability are now important considerations for growers. Caught between intensifying demands from both the marketplace and the local community, agriculture struggles to maintain a viable position.



Louise Ann Noeth

## HARVESTED ACRES

### WHAT IS THE MEASURE?

The measure is the number of crop producing acres in Ventura County. This measure includes all irrigated acres plus a minor amount of dry land farmed acreage. It does not include rangeland or agricultural lands not subject to crop production.

### WHY IS THE MEASURE IMPORTANT?

Although the measure does not include the total acres farmed or in agriculture in the county, it represents virtually all crop production and value. It also includes the high-value land of the plains and valleys that is under the most pressure from urbanization encroachment.

### HOW ARE WE DOING?

Harvested acres totaled approximately 105,000 acres in 2000, down from a recent high of about 120,000 acres in 1994. The recent trend is due not only to urbanization but also to other factors. The advent of low-volume drip and sprinkler irrigation technology in the 1970s and 1980s allowed additional hillside lands to be brought under cultivation, thus offsetting farmland losses to urbanization. By 1990 the supply of available new land was exhausted. Since then irrigated acreage has been fairly stable, with a decline noted at the end of the period.

TOTAL HARVESTED ACRES IN VENTURA COUNTY  
(IN THOUSANDS OF ACRES)

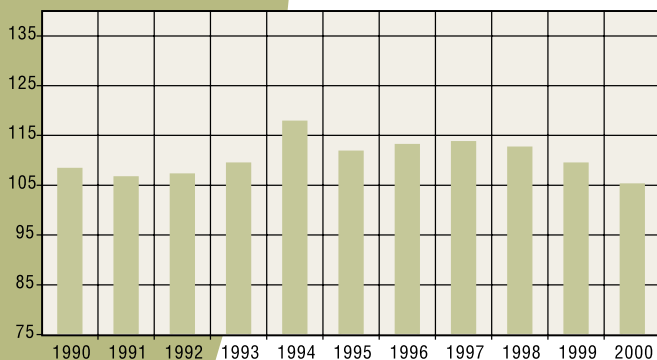


Chart AG-1

# CROP VALUE

## WHAT IS THE MEASURE?

Crop value is the total wholesale value of all crops and livestock produced in the county as reported annually by the Agricultural Commissioner.

## WHY IS THE MEASURE IMPORTANT?

The measure of total crop value tracks the growth or contraction of the agricultural economy. The agriculture percentage indicates the trend of agriculture's economic importance to the county.

## HOW ARE WE DOING?

Total crop value (unadjusted for inflation) has been fairly flat over the last decade at approximately \$1 billion. An increase at the end of the period reflects an increase in the acreage devoted to berries and nurseries, which have higher crop values. The numbers indicate that although the composition of local agriculture is changing, its economy remains stable.

## TOTAL CROP VALUE IN DOLLARS AND AS % OF TOTAL VENTURA COUNTY ECONOMY

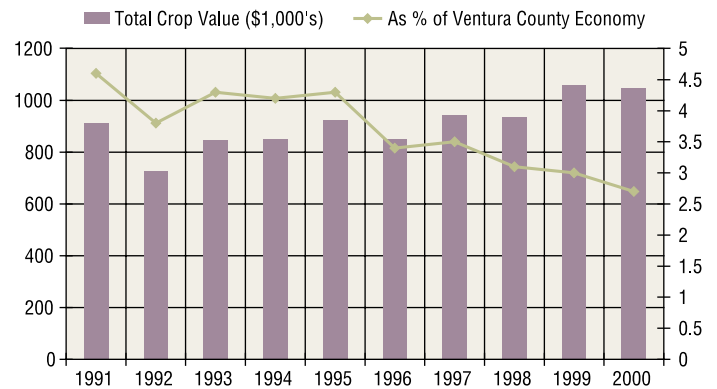


Chart AG-2

# CROP VALUE PER ACRE

## CROP VALUE PER HARVESTED ACRE

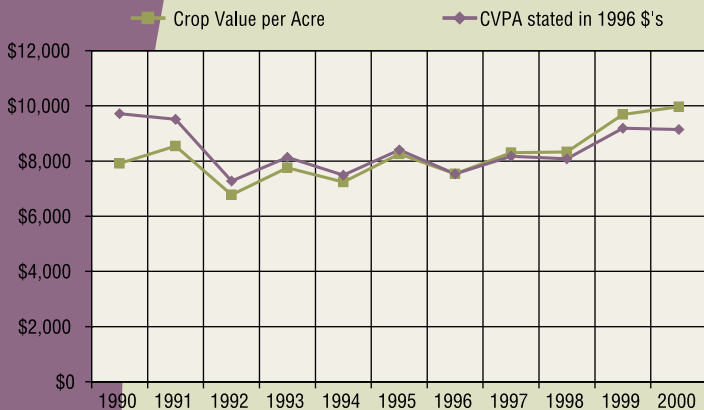


Chart AG-3

1990s but remain in the vicinity of \$1,000 per acre. However, if adjusted for inflation, this trend disappears into a flat line. This stability masks significant transitions occurring in the sectors of local agriculture, as it struggles to maintain its health in the face of significant market globalization pressures.

## WHAT IS THE MEASURE?

Crop Value per acre is the total wholesale crop value divided by the number of harvested acres.

## WHY IS THE MEASURE IMPORTANT?

Though it is not a measure of profitability, crop value per acre tracks the total economic sales return to the farmer, on average, for each acre of land. A rising line would indicate a healthy agriculture economy, based on either successful crop volumes and sales, or a trend away from lower value crops to higher value crops (e.g. from citrus to strawberries).

## HOW ARE WE DOING?

Crop values per acre show a slight upward trend over the

# LAND VALUES

## WHAT IS THE MEASURE?

The measure is the value of agricultural land per acre, divided into row crops, including vegetable and berries, and the tree crops, including lemons, oranges and avocados. The values are drawn from the records of actual transfers of land between buyers and sellers, assembled by a statewide professional appraisers' association.

## ESTIMATED VALUE OF TREE CROP LAND IN VENTURA COUNTY - DOLLARS PER ACRE

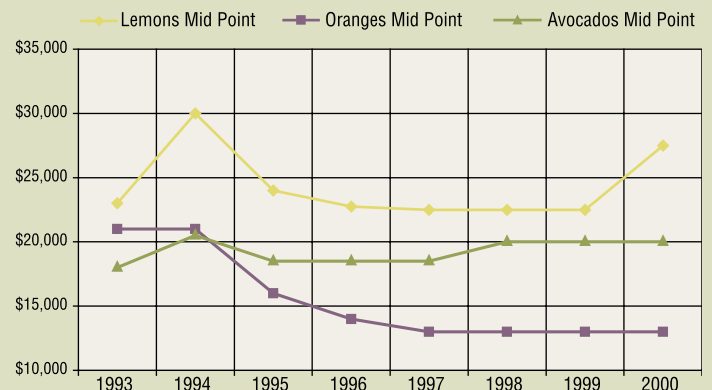


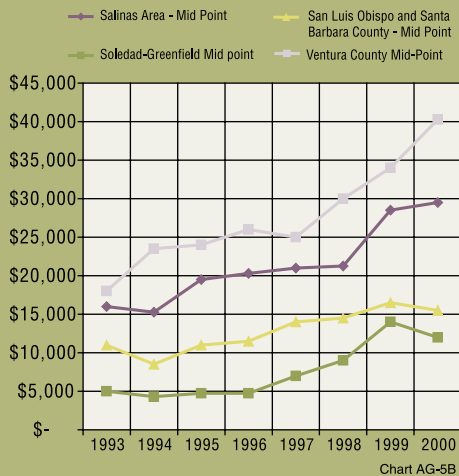
Chart AG-5A

## WHY IS THE MEASURE IMPORTANT?

Land is the basic raw ingredient for agriculture. Its value reflects the relative profitability of different crops over time. It is also strongly related to the value of agricultural leases, which is important, as leased land plays an important role in our agricultural economy. An important component of land value is speculative value. Speculative value can inflate the value of agricultural

land over its farming value. High land values put considerable pressure on farmers to maximize their utilization of this invaluable resource. Even under SOAR, it is difficult to peel off speculative value completely. Farmland, in close proximity to areas perceived to be ripe for development may be perceived by the marketplace as having additional value.

### ESTIMATED VALUES OF ROW CROP LANDS IN VENTURA COUNTY AND THE REGION - DOLLARS PER ACRE



## HOW ARE WE DOING?

Overall, the price of farmland in Ventura County has not diminished as a result of the adoption of voter approved urban growth boundaries, as might have been expected. The value of agricultural land for row crops ranges between \$30,000 and \$50,000 per acre. For tree crops, the average hovers between \$15,000 and \$30,000 per acre. Row-crop land prices have ascended steadily as the plantings of higher value crops such as strawberries have increased. The price of lemon and avocado land has held stable, reflecting the consistent performance of those crops in the marketplace, while orange land has declined in value.

## EMPLOYMENT AND EARNINGS IN AGRICULTURE

### WHAT ARE THE MEASURES?

The measure includes the full number of jobs in county agriculture, including field workers, supervisors, and other employees of agricultural entities; and the total agricultural payroll divided by the number of workers

### WHY ARE THE MEASURES IMPORTANT?

The number of jobs is another way of measuring the agricultural economy's impact on, and significance to, Ventura County. Traditionally, agricultural wages

are significantly lower than wages in the urban economy. Yet the welfare of employees is a critical factor to a successful and healthy agricultural sector. Tracking employment and average salary shows whether workers and, by extension, the broader community are sharing in agriculture's economic progress. They also tend to indicate whether agriculture is having success in meeting its social equity responsibilities as an employer.

### HOW ARE WE DOING?

Agricultural employment remained fairly static (in the range of 16,000 to 18,000 jobs) until 2000, when lemon orchards on the Oxnard plain gave way to higher value row crop development, mainly in berries and nurseries. This more intense level of agriculture requires greater numbers of workers.

Average annual salaries hovered in the vicinity of \$15,000 until the mid 1990s, then rose rapidly to approximately \$22,000 before leveling off again. This increase came about because more profitable crops translated into better opportunities for workers, and because competition for agricultural workers has become keener. Despite these increases, Ventura County experiences increasing difficulty in retaining an experienced farm labor work force because of high housing costs.

### EMPLOYMENT AND EMPLOYMENT EARNINGS IN AGRICULTURE

