

**COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
AGENDA ITEM TRANSMITTAL**

(1) DEPARTMENT Agricultural Commissioner	(2) MEETING DATE 5/10/2016	(3) CONTACT/PHONE Martin Settevendemie 805.781.5910	
(4) SUBJECT Presentation of the 2015 Annual Agricultural Statistics for San Luis Obispo County. All Districts.			
(5) RECOMMENDED ACTION It is recommended that your Board receive and file the 2015 Annual Agricultural Statistics for San Luis Obispo County.			
(6) FUNDING SOURCE(S) N/A	(7) CURRENT YEAR FINANCIAL IMPACT \$0.00	(8) ANNUAL FINANCIAL IMPACT \$0.00	(9) BUDGETED? N/A
(10) AGENDA PLACEMENT { } Consent    { } Presentation    { } Hearing (Time Est. ___)    { X } Board Business (Time Est. <u>15</u> )			
(11) EXECUTED DOCUMENTS { } Resolutions    { } Contracts    { } Ordinances    { X } N/A			
(12) OUTLINE AGREEMENT REQUISITION NUMBER (OAR) N/A		(13) BUDGET ADJUSTMENT REQUIRED? BAR ID Number: N/A { } 4/5 Vote Required    { X } N/A	
(14) LOCATION MAP N/A	(15) BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT? No	(16) AGENDA ITEM HISTORY { X } N/A    Date: _____	
(17) ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE REVIEW Lisa M. Howe			
(18) SUPERVISOR DISTRICT(S) All Districts			

# County of San Luis Obispo



TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Agricultural Commissioner / Martin Settevendemie  
805.781.5910

DATE: 5/10/2016

SUBJECT: Presentation of the 2015 Annual Agricultural Statistics for San Luis Obispo County. All Districts.

## **Recommendation:**

It is recommended that your Board receive and file the 2015 Annual Agricultural Statistics for San Luis Obispo County.

## **Discussion:**

The Agricultural Commissioner/Sealer will present your Board a summary of crop and livestock statistics for the calendar year of 2015. The summary includes industry trends, production levels and gross values.

The agricultural industry in San Luis Obispo County continues to be a major contributor to the county's prosperous economy. With severe drought conditions persisting for a fourth consecutive year, agricultural production levels were impacted in 2015. Overall crop values were \$828,800,000, an 8% decline compared to 2014. This figure represents only commodity gross values and does not reflect net profits received by local agricultural producers.

The top ten commodities by value in 2015 were:

1. Strawberries
2. Wine Grapes - all
3. Cattle and Calves
4. Broccoli
5. Vegetable Transplants
6. Cut Flowers
7. Head Lettuce
8. Leaf Lettuce
9. Avocados
10. Lemons

## **Fruit Crops:**

In 2015, and for the second year in a row, strawberries were the top valued crop in the county. Strawberries benefitted from dry weather conditions that plagued other crops. Over 3,400 acres were planted, meeting the high demand for fresh and processing berries. Mild temperatures and limited rainfall resulted in good production levels, low disease pressure and high quality fruit. Growers continued to diversify by planting blackberries, raspberries and blueberries. The plastic hoop houses visible primarily in the south county area are evidence of this diversification.

Unusually cool spring temperatures and strong winds caused wine grape blossoms to shatter before the fruit was set on the vines in many areas. This severely reduced yield, resulting in a 31% drop in production for wine grapes, compared to 2014. Further impacting production was salt accumulation in the soil. Well below normal seasonal rainfall hindered accumulated salts, which are natural components of groundwater, from leaching out of the root zone, causing increased stress to vines and reduced production. Despite prices remaining favorable, the value for all wine grapes decreased 28% compared to 2014.

Avocado trees continued to be severely pruned or stumped throughout the county in 2015. Stumping is a cultural practice employed to reduce the leaf canopy and water demand of trees when there is a lack of water for irrigation. Ongoing drought conditions created salt build up in the soil from lack of leaching rains, negatively affecting production levels and impacting overall fruit size for those orchards that had not been stumped. Total production yields for avocados decreased by 10% over 2014. It will take several years for avocado trees to rebound once normal rainfall returns to avocado growing regions.

Dryland farmed walnut trees were especially hard hit by the continued drought. Loss of half century old trees, limb dieback and low yields contributed to an overall 25% reduction in value compared to 2014. The drought impacts and low prices forced some orchards to be left unharvested. The total value for the fruit and nut category decreased nearly 9% compared to 2014.

#### Animal Industry:

The impact of ongoing drought conditions to cattle production was dramatic. Low forage production on grazing land influenced by severe drought conditions forced the sale of cattle beginning in 2013 and spiking to a record high in 2014. By 2015, herd sizes in the county had been significantly reduced as evident by the sharp decrease in sales recorded at year end. The number of head of cattle sold in 2015 was less than half the number sold in 2014. Demand and prices for cattle were strong, a reflection of the negative impact of the drought on cattle production areas throughout California. The total value for the Animal category plunged 48% compared to 2014.

#### Vegetable Crops:

Vegetable crops were in high demand in 2015, due to reduced production throughout California's drought stricken vegetable production areas. This is reflected in the strong prices for most vegetable varieties. Broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, celery, head and leaf lettuces, and spinach enjoyed particularly strong demand and prices. However, an overall 6% reduction in harvested acreage was reported, as some fields were left fallow due to lack of irrigation water and insufficient farm labor. Drought related crop damage and reduced yields due to salt build up in the soil were impacts commonly reported by producers. Overall, the value for all vegetables increased 10% compared to 2014.

#### Nursery Products:

Vegetable and perennial ornamental plant seedling transplants were in high demand in 2015. Vegetable growers transitioned from traditional direct field seeding to planting transplants. By utilizing transplants, growers were able to reduce the amount of irrigation water normally required to germinate seeds.

Water use restrictions that went into place across California in 2015 created mixed results for nursery stock producers. Succulents and other drought tolerant plants remained popular throughout 2015. Producers enjoyed a slight rebound in housing construction which created an increased demand for perennial, drought tolerant ornamental plants. However, consumer interest in landscaping rebate programs shifted them away from thirsty bedding plants and lawns to drought tolerant landscape plants. The resulting 19% rebound in value over 2014 restored production values closer to historic levels.

#### Field Crops:

Growers who were successful in predicting the timing of their plantings to coincide with late spring rains were rewarded with high seed germination and solid yields. A total of 6,000 additional acres of grain hay were planted, compared to 2014. However, prices were down, a reflection of the decreased demand for feed due to the reduction in livestock numbers statewide. Alfalfa production was down by 36% coupled with lower prices leading to a 49% decline in value. The total value for all types of field crops dropped 7% lower than 2014 values.

Agriculture continued to be a significant economic contributor in 2015 and represents a central component of the rural character enjoyed by the local community, and a dependable source of high quality food and products for consumers around the world. Despite challenging drought and unusual weather during 2015, agriculture in San Luis Obispo County remains strong. With over one hundred different crops produced in the county, this diversity provides for stability when growing conditions become demanding.

The 2015 Annual Report will be released in July, 2016. Annual Reports from 1928 through 2014 can be viewed at [www.slocounty.ca.gov/agcomm](http://www.slocounty.ca.gov/agcomm).

**Other Agency Involvement:**

None

**Financial Considerations:**

There are no fiscal impacts associated with this update.

**Results:**

The statistics will help to inform your Board and the public about production levels and the total gross value of agriculture in San Luis Obispo County for 2015.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Attachment A-2015 Crop Statistics