

Agriculture and Mariposa County's Economy

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Agriculture in Mariposa County helps to define our landscape. Yosemite – the iconic symbol of Mariposa County is cradled by the beautiful rolling oak woodlands that are home to our famous cattle ranches. Hidden in small valleys and on picturesque hillsides are winegrape vineyards that supply local wineries. Other agricultural enterprises provide an array of products for local and regional markets.

It is difficult to estimate the dollar value of the environmental services that production agriculture provides to our residents, but the economic impacts spread deeply into the regional economy. A starting point for estimating the economic impact is the annual report of agriculture ⁽¹⁾ that is prepared by the County Department of Agriculture. UC economists have developed multiplier factors that help us estimate what the true economic impact of an agricultural activity is. A multiplier reflects the fact that farmers purchase a wide array of goods of services in town; the crop or animal must be processed, transported and marketed; and the employees of the farmer and processors take home paychecks⁽²⁾.

Starting with our most visible Ag industry – cattle and calves - we can multiply the 2009 “farm gate” (the price the farmer receives) value of \$13,883,000 by a factor of 1.8 to estimate that there is \$24,989,400 in economic activity generated in our regional economy. The smaller poultry industry in the county had a farm gate value of \$1,369,000. Multiplied by 2.8 and we realize a total positive impact to the regional economy of \$4,589,200.

Winegrapes have a large multiplier factor of 7.8. That reflects that a product with a lower price per pound in the field ends up with a very high price per unit in the bottle. It also reflects that the processing, bottling, storing and shipping occur locally. Taking a farm gate value of \$105,000 X 7.8 gives a positive impact to the local economy of \$819,000.

An additional benefit that the cattle and winegrape industries provide is the contribution to tourism. One will often observe visitors to the area stopped along the road taking pictures. Some operations cater to tourists and host visitors or special events. The attraction of wine tasting rooms is obvious.

(1) 2009 Annual Report of Agriculture. Mariposa County Department of Agriculture

(2) Sarquist, Armen V. Economic impacts of agricultural production and processing in Stanislaus County. University of California Cooperative Extension. 49pp (March 1981).