

SHEEP PRODUCTION IN MARIN COUNTY

Marin County sheep production is an example of an agricultural industry that has evolved and adapted over many years. In the mid to latter parts of the 19th century, the high hopes of striking it rich in the gold mines were fading. Settlers liked what they saw when they came to California, and they didn't want to leave this beautiful land. Some of the first crops grown in Marin County by settlers were potatoes and barley, which remained strong crops for years. There was, however, a drop in demand for potato and barley crops, as well as changes in modes of transportation in the early 1900s, which in turn created a heightened interest for livestock agriculture consisting mainly of beef, sheep, dairy, and some poultry production. Family history and experience with various livestock, topography of the land, and soil type helped influence what kind of livestock a family raised.

Sheep production was usually done in conjunction with other ranching enterprises even though ranchers initially thought that beef and sheep were not compatible. Chicken producers always had a few sheep around to "keep the grass down around the barns".

Dairy production in Marin County had grown successful over the years, however, not every ranch had the topography to suit dairy production. More and more it was noticed that Marin land was well suited for sheep. Sheep production didn't require flat land for a dairy barn and didn't require as much water as dairy production.

Marin's shallow soils, steepness of canyons, and the fact that cattle were harder on the land paved the way for the expansion of the sheep industry in the 1950s as other livestock industries were fading. Essentially, sheep ranching evolved from other agricultural businesses that didn't make it. Production of sheep was a niche that didn't require a large capital investment and the hilly topography of Marin was better suited to sheep grazing. However, the high rainfall in the area does not make it the most efficient climate for wool production. Marin County climate is more suitable for meat production.

In the 1950s when poultry production declined due to the inability of the small poultry ranches to compete with the bigger operations, sheep production increased. Changes in sanitation regulations greatly affected the dairy industry around this time as well. Sheep production allowed a rancher to do something with their land when there were few options available. As a result, there arose a greater interest in cattle and sheep ranching.

The 1950s - 1960s brought advances in pasture improvement. Research was improving the diet of sheep and beef and improving pasture management which allowed ranchers to intensify production.

Sheep ranching peaked in the late 1950s with estimates of over 100,000 head in Marin County. Small local butchers and numerous livestock auction facilities made the sheep industry lucrative. There was a market for small operators to sell, and it was the same with the wool buyers.

Over the years, however, the animal processing industries became more specialized. Small operations were closing down because they couldn't keep up with the bigger facilities due to modernization. The number of market outlets has decreased over the years. The introduction of polyester and other man-made fibers, as well as standard-issue military clothing switching to man-made fibers, has significantly reduced wool production. Woolen mills have moved, relocated and specialized. Both wool and meat are being imported from Australia and New Zealand. The 1970s brought the beginnings of coyote depredation in Marin County, adding to the decline in sheep numbers.

Today, Marin County has approximately 10,000 sheep, yielding a gross production value in excess of \$580,000. Niche marketing carries the biggest potential for growth, specifically organic wool and meat production. From its humble beginnings in the early 1900s, the Marin County sheep industry has survived highs and lows, utilizing the tried and true methods of the past, while combining the technology of today.



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE • WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

April 1, 1999

William J. Lyons, Jr., Secretary
California Department of Food and Agriculture
and

Marin County Board of Supervisors

Annette Rose, President, District 3

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Steve Kinsey, District 4

Harold C. Brown, District 2

Cynthia Murray, District 5

STACY K. CARLSEN
COMMISSIONER/DIRECTOR

ANDREA DeGRASSI
DEPUTY COMMISSIONER/DIRECTOR

In accordance with the provisions of Section 2279 of the California Food and Agricultural Code, I am pleased to submit the Annual Crop Report for 1998. This report is a summary of counts, acreage, yields, and gross value of agricultural production in Marin County. The 1998 gross value of all production was \$56,166,946. The report represents gross returns to the producer and does not indicate actual net profit.

The weather played a significant role yet again in determining the overall value and the shifts in production for agriculture in Marin during 1998.

Milk is the long standing, premier crop for Marin, and this year accounts for over 69% of the crop report's total value. Milk had an 8.9% decrease in production from 1997, as production was likely affected by the rains that were responsible for disaster declaration in 35 of 58 counties. However, milk saw a 7.6% or \$2.7 million increase in value. The increase in value is due to higher milk prices for the farmers brought on by an unusually high demand from cheese makers. Milk prices received by farmers increased 18% per hundred weight of market milk.

Livestock value fell by \$2.8 million as prices received dropped significantly from last year's exceptionally good market prices. Production also decreased. Poultry value went up 21% as prices and production increased.

Aquaculture had a dramatic 48% drop in value last year as it experienced production and harvest problems. Juvenile oyster mortality resulted in big production losses. State health and water quality agencies also banned harvesting for a time until water quality issues in Tomales Bay were addressed.

The value of fruit and vegetable production went down by 18.8% due largely to the five inches of rain in May that delayed plantings of vegetable and hay crops and reduced yields. Despite an overall county decline in the industry, nursery crops saw a better year with the addition of two new production sites and better market prices.

My appreciation goes to all of the individuals and organizations for their cooperation in providing the information for this report.

Respectfully submitted,

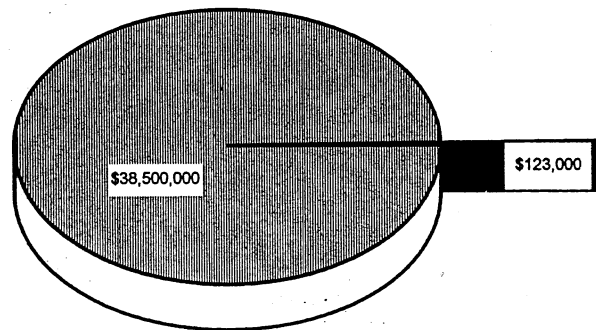
Stacy K. Carlsen
Agricultural Commissioner

FIELD, FRUIT & VEGETABLE CROPS

ITEM	YEAR	HARVESTED ACREAGE	TOTAL UNITS	DOLLAR VALUE	
				PER UNIT	TOTAL
Hay, Grass	1997	1,547	2,509	75.60	\$189,681
	1998	1,823	3,181	92.81	\$295,235
Hay, Oats	1997	1,992	4,507	54.81	\$247,050
	1998	1,400	1,885	65.38	\$123,250
Silage	1997	3,349	31,706	22.80	\$723,099
	1998	2,918	35,184	27.71	\$975,035
Hay, Grain	1997	485	261	408.64	\$106,656
	1998	20	15	140.00	\$2,100
Pasture, Irrigated	1997	824		101.00	\$83,224
	1998	800		100.00	\$82,000
Pasture, Other	1997	154,000		29.00	\$4,466,000
	1998	154,000		29.00	\$4,466,000
Fruits & Vegetables	1997	234			\$1,298,370
	1998	247			\$1,053,270
TOTAL	1997	162,262			\$7,162,265
	1998	161,377			\$6,948,705

LIVESTOCK PRODUCTS				
		DOLLAR VALUE		
ITEM	YEAR	PROD. UNIT	PER UNIT	TOTAL
Milk: Market	1997	2,692,365 Cwt	13.18	\$35,489,000
	1998	2,477,310 Cwt	15.54	\$38,500,000
Milk:Manufact.	1997	35,368 Cwt	11.74	\$415,000
	1998	7,899 Cwt	15.62	\$123,000
Wool	1997	83,106 Lbs	.65	\$54,019
	1998	71,258 Lbs	.45	\$32,066
TOTAL	1997			\$35,958,019
	1998			\$38,655,066

MILK PRODUCTION VALUES



MILK: MARKET
 MILK: MANUFACTURING

LIVESTOCK AND POULTRY			
ITEM	YEAR	NO. OF HEAD	DOLLAR VALUE TOTAL
Cattle	1997	22,951	\$7,674,279
	1998	17,881	\$5,039,604
Lambs	1997	8,837	\$749,201
	1998	7,044	\$580,819
Poultry and Eggs: Hatching	1997		\$2,240,608
	1998		\$2,710,498
TOTAL	1997		\$10,664,088
	1998		\$8,330,921

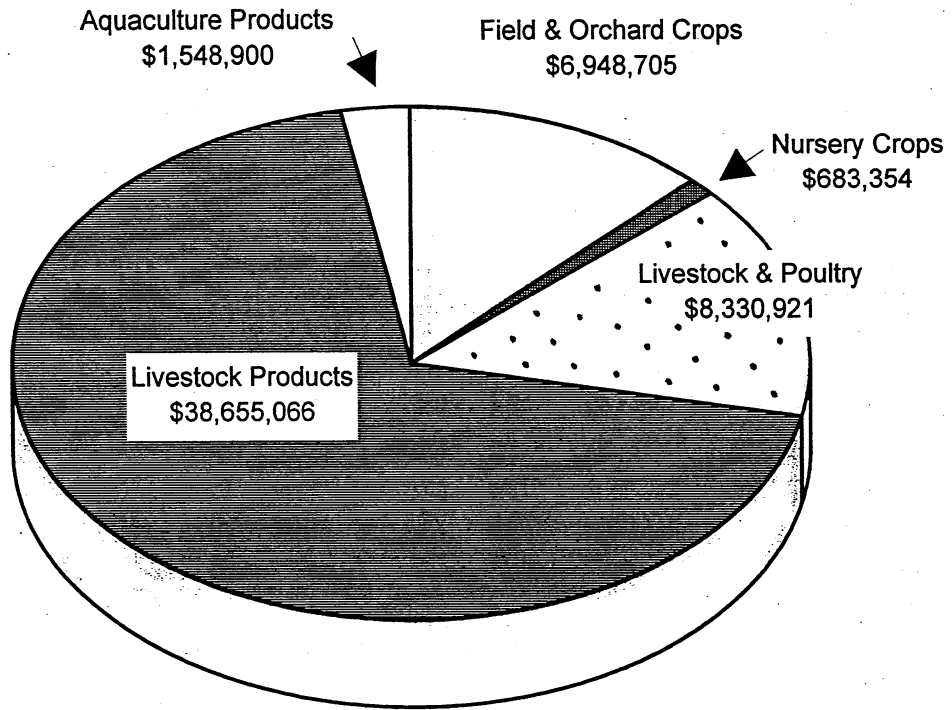
INVENTORIES OF LIVESTOCK & POULTRY		
ITEM	January 1, 1998	January 1, 1999
All Cattle	44,053	43,142
Dairy Cows	13,100	12,600
Beef Cows	11,550	12,128
Stock Sheep	9,234	8,772
Poultry	120,908	119,662

NURSERY PRODUCTS				
		PRODUCTION AREA		TOTAL
		HOUSE SQUARE FT	FIELD AREAS	
ITEM	YEAR			
Nursery	1997	159,300	39.75	\$547,182
	1998	90,800	44.13	\$683,354

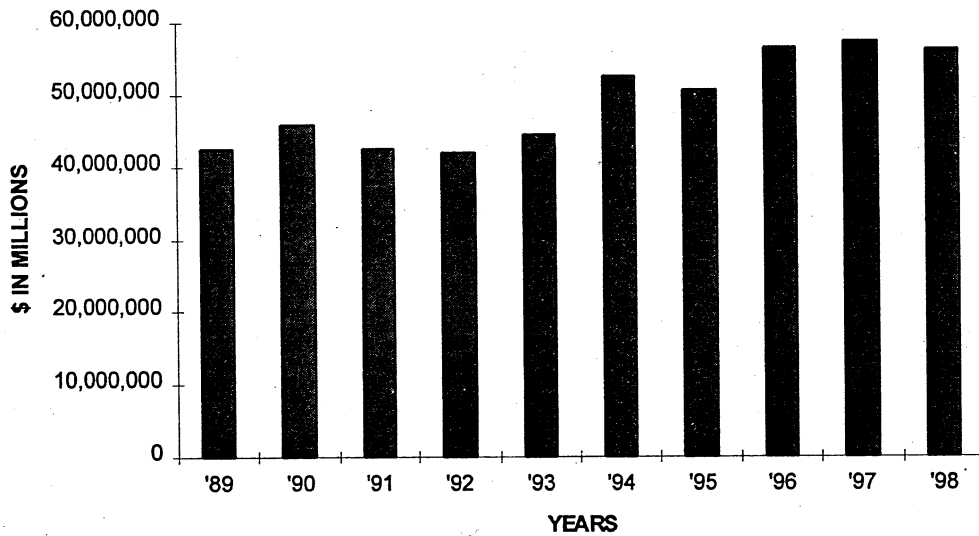
AQUACULTURE PRODUCTS			
	YEAR	PRODUCTION ACREAGE	DOLLAR VALUE
Oysters, Clams, Mussels, Abalone	1997	1,545	\$3,007,430
	1998	1,287	\$1,548,900

COMPILATION		
	1997	1998
Field & Orchard Crops	\$7,162,265	\$6,948,705
Nursery Crops	\$547,182	\$683,354
Livestock & Poultry	\$10,664,088	\$8,330,921
Livestock Products	\$35,958,019	\$38,655,066
Aquaculture Products	\$3,007,430	\$1,548,900
TOTAL	\$57,338,984	\$56,166,946

1998 COMPILATION



AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION GROSS VALUE TEN YEAR SUMMARY



SUMMARY OF THE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES

ORGANIC FOOD PRODUCTION

Organic farming emphasizes a greater cooperation with nature without reliance on synthetic chemical inputs. All organic producers register in their principal county of operation.

Organic commodities produced in Marin County included: Apples, beans, berries, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, chard, cucumbers, cut flowers, garlic, herbs, leaf lettuce, mixed salad greens, olives, onions, pears, potatoes, pumpkins, silage, spinach, sprouts, squash, tomatoes, turnips, vegetable starts and watercress. Organic dairy products included: Milk, cheese, butter, yogurt, whipping cream and buttermilk.

There are 28 registered organic producers in Marin County farming 385 acres, producing a total gross value of 3.2 million dollars.

BIOLOGICAL CONTROL

Biological pest control is the use of natural enemies to help suppress pest populations to acceptable levels. Once the agent becomes established, control is self perpetuating, potentially reducing the need to use pesticides.

PEST

Gorse
Bull Thistle
Yellow Star Thistle
Scotch Broom
Ash White Fly
Italian Thistle
Puncture Vine
Kalamath Weed
Canada Thistle
Plumeless Thistle

BIOLOGICAL AGENT/MECHANISM

Gorse Mite, Seed Weevil
Bull Thistle Gall Fly
Seed Head Weevil, Gall Fly, Hairy Weevil, Peacock Fly
Seed Weevil, Stem Boring Moth
Parasitic Wasp
Seed Weevil
Seed Weevil
Beetle
Mechanical and chemical removal
Mechanical and chemical removal

PEST PREVENTION

Pest prevention is the systematic search for injurious pests before they have become established to help prevent costly and environmentally disruptive eradication programs.

Exclusion

3,803 shipments of incoming plant material inspected at UPS, Federal Express, Postal and delivery trucks.
167 shipments placed under quarantine for violation of plant quarantine laws, up due to Balsam Fir Gall Midge - "B" rated.

Detection

1,148 exotic pest traps are placed in Marin County as front line to detect pests such as Medfly, Japanese Beetle, and Gypsy Moth. (Medfly find (July 14, 1998) caused about 500 extra traps to be placed.)

DEPARTMENT STAFF

Agricultural Commissioner/Director of Weights and Measures

Stacy K. Carlsen

Deputy Agricultural Commissioner/Deputy Director of Weights and Measures

Andrea deGrassi

Agricultural/Weights and Measures Inspectors

Albert Powell

Anita Sauber

Charles Hsu

Laurel Thomassin

Senior Secretary

Joanne Van Cleave

Sr. Clerk/Typist

Linda Carlson

Departmental Mission Statement

Our mission is to serve the public's interest by ensuring equity in the market place, promoting and protecting agriculture, protecting environmental quality and health and welfare of Marin County's citizens.

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