Sarasota County, Florida
Local Farm & Food Economy

Highlights of a data compilation
by Ken Meter, Crossroads Resource Center (Minneapolis) for
Sarasota County Government
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Sarasota County (Florida)
355,722 residents receive $15.3 billion income annually (2004). Real personal income has increased 40% per year since 1976. $2.5 billion (16%) of this personal income is government payments.

The county's farms (Agricultural Census, 2002)

Land:
- 371 farms. This is 0.8% of Florida's total.
- 23 (6%) of these are 1,000 acres or more in size.
- 255 (69%) farms are less than 50 acres.
- While the average farm size is 327 acres, the median size is 15 acres.
- The county has 121,310 acres of land in farms.
- This amounts to 1.2% of the state's farmland.
- 6,418 acres of harvested cropland.
- 92 farms (25%) have a total of 5,002 acres of irrigated land.
- Average value of land and buildings per farm is $841,623. This is 126% of the state average.

Sales:
- $17.8 million of crops and livestock sold (2002). Note that the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) shows $28 million in sales for 2002 and generally much higher values than the Census. No explanation for this is known.
- $13.3 million of crops sold (75% of sales).
- $4.5 million of livestock and products sold (25% of sales).
- 94% of Sarasota County ag sales involved (1) Nursery and Greenhouse crops, 47%; (2) Fruit, 27%, and (3) Cattle and calves, 20%.
- The number of farms/ ranches selling livestock, poultry and related products fell 38% from 1997 to 2002 (293 to 183), while the amount of livestock products sold fell 39%.
- 231 (62%) county farms sold less than $5,000 of products in 2002.
- 32 farms (9%) sold more than $100,000 of products.
- 63% of county farms (233 of 371) reported net losses in 2002.
- County farmers collected a combined average of $14,207 of federal commodity support payments from 1995-2004 (Environmental Working Group).
Cattle & Dairy:
- 176 ranches and farms hold an inventory of 22,741 cattle.
- 9,139 cattle (40%) were sold in 2002 for total sales of $3.6 million, a decline from 13,374 sold in 1997 for $4.4 million.
- 5,024 young cattle — weighing less than 500 pounds — were sold by county ranchers. This is less than half of 1997 sales of 10,994.
- 46% of Sarasota County's cattle inventory live on 8 ranches having 500 or more cattle.
- 33% of the county's cattle ranches hold fewer than 10 animals.
- 4 farms raise 9 milk cows. There were 377 milk cows in 1997, on 21 farms.
- 15 farms produce 1,968 tons of forage crops (hay, etc.).

Distribution of cattle inventory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animals</th>
<th>Farms</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 to 9</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 19</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 49</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 to 99</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 to 199</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1,706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200 to 499</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4,356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500 or more</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7,005</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Distribution of cattle sales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animals sold</th>
<th>Farms</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 to 9</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 19</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 49</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 to 99</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1,056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 to 199</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200 to 499</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4,131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500 or more</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2,591</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Distribution of forage farm size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farm size</th>
<th># farms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 to 24 acres</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 99 acres</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 to 249 acres</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other livestock & animal products:
- 15 farms hold an inventory of 181 hogs and pigs, down from the 47 farms having 526 hogs and pigs in 1997. This is a two-thirds decline in both number of farms and inventory in five years.
- Hog and pig sales fell from $71,000 in 1997 to $9,000 in 2002.
- 7 farms hold an inventory of 68 sheep and lambs.
- 20 farms raise poultry, 17 to harvest their eggs.
- 13 of these farms hold less than 50 birds.
- 3 of these farms hold 50-99 birds.
- 1 of these farms holds 20,000 - 50,000 birds.
Five years earlier, 41 farms sold poultry.
5 farms hold an inventory of 23 milk goats.
128 farms hold an inventory of 882 horses; 28 farms sold 110 horses in 2002.
Sarasota County has 1,840 bee colonies.

**Vegetables & Melons (some farmers state that Ag Census data does not fully represent vegetable production):**
- 8 farms work 83 acres to raise vegetables.
- 4 farms raise 6 acres of snap beans.
- 1 farm raises broccoli.
- 2 farms raise cabbage.
- 1 farm raises carrots.
- 1 farm raises celery.
- 1 farm raises collard greens.
- 1 farm raises cucumbers.
- 1 farm raises kale.
- 1 farm raises lettuce.
- 1 farm raises mustard greens.
- 4 farms raise 2 acres of okra.
- 5 farms raise 10 acres of green onions.
- 1 farm raises blackeyed peas.
- 4 farms raise radishes.
- 1 farm raises spinach.
- 2 farms raise sweet peppers.
- 1 farm raises squash.
- 6 farms raise 15 acres of sweet corn.
- 3 farms raise 20 acres of tomatoes.

**Distribution of vegetable farm size**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farm size</th>
<th>#farms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.1 to 4.9 acres</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0 to 24.9 acres</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.0 to 99.9 acres</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fruits (some farmers state that Ag Census data does not fully represent fruit production):**
- The county has 43 farms with a total of 3,887 acres of orchards. 41 of these raise citrus fruit. Fruits accounted for 27% of county ag sales.
- 32 farms raise 3,110 acres of oranges, including:
  - 28 farms raise 1,852 acres of Valencia oranges.
  - 24 farms raise 1,259 acres of "other oranges:" (tangelos — 11 farms; tangerines — 10 farms; "other" citrus — 2 farms).
- 10 farms raise tangerines.
- 2 farms raise "other citrus."
- 20 farms raise 565 acres of grapefruit.
- 4 farms raise lemons.
- 3 farms raise limes.
- 9 farms raise 18 acres of berries.
- 2 farms raise watermelons.
Distribution of orchard size:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total acreage</th>
<th># farms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.1 to 4.9 acres</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0 to 24.9 acres</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.0 to 99.9 acres</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100.0 to 249.9 acres</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250.0 to 499.9 acres</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500.0 acres or more</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500.0 to 749.9 acres</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>750.0 to 999.9 acres</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000.0 acres or more</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nursery and Greenhouse plants

- This sector accounts for 47% of all agricultural sales in Sarasota County.
- 61 farms have 357,106 square feet of greenhouse space, and 1,314 acres in the open.

Direct and organic sales:

- 24 farms sell $239,000 of food directly to consumers. This is a 23% drop in the number of farms (31 in 1997) selling direct, and a 34% decrease of direct sales from 1997 to 2002.
- Sarasota County farmers are more likely than other Florida farmers to sell direct, with 2% of state sales.
- 5 county farms sold organic foods ($40,000 sales).
- 363 farms in Florida sold $5.9 million of organic food products.

Balance of Cash Receipts and Production Costs (BEA):

Sarasota County ranchers and farmers sell $34 million of food commodities per year (1976-2004 average), spending $24 million to raise them, for an average gain of $10 million each year. Note that these sales figures compiled by the BEA are far higher than cash receipts recorded by the USDA Agriculture Census (above).

Overall, farm producers have earned a surplus of $286 million since 1976. Total county cash flow has been positive each year since 1969. Nevertheless, 63% of the county’s farms and ranches lost money in 2002 (Ag Census). Sarasota County farmers and ranchers earned $3 million less by selling commodities in 1969 than they earned in 2004 (in 2004 dollars).

Farmers and ranchers earn another $823,000 per year of farm-related income — primarily custom work, and rental income (twenty-nine year average for 1976-2004). Federal farm support payments are relatively small, averaging $14,207 per year for the entire county for the years 1995-2004; BEA; Environmental Working Group).

The county’s consumers:

Sarasota County consumers spend $797 million buying food each year, including $468 million for home use. Most of this food is produced outside the region. Only $239,000 of food products (0.7% of farm cash receipts) are sold by farmers directly to consumers.
Estimated change in net assets for all county households combined was a loss of $835 million in 2004 (BLS).

**Farm and food economy summary:**
Farmers gain $10 million each year producing food commodities, but spend $7 million buying inputs from external suppliers, for a total gain of $3 million to the county.

Meanwhile, consumers spend $500 million buying food from outside. Thus, total loss to the region is $500 million of potential wealth each year. This loss amounts to 15 times the value of all food commodities raised in the region.

**Sarasota County: markets for food eaten at home (2004):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Millions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meats, poultry, fish, and eggs</td>
<td>$127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruits &amp; vegetables</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cereals and bakery products</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy products</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Other,” incl. sweets, fats, &amp; oils</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key data sources:

Bureau of Economic Analysis data on farm production balance
http://www.bea.doc.gov/bea/regional/reis/

Food consumption estimates from Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Expenditure Survey
http://www.bls.gov/cex/home.htm

U.S. Census of Agriculture
http://www.nass.usda.gov/census/

USDA/ Economic Research Service food consumption data:
http://www.ers.usda.gov/data/foodconsumption/

USDA/ Economic Research Service farm income data:
http://ers.usda.gov/Data/FarmIncome/finfidmu.htm

For more information:

To see results from Finding Food in Farm Country studies in other regions of Minnesota, Iowa, California, Hawaii: http://www.crcworks.org/ffc.pdf.

To read the original Finding Food in Farm Country study from Southeast Minnesota (written for the Experiment in Rural Cooperation): http://www.crcworks.org/ff.pdf.

To view a PowerPoint presented by Ken Meter at a keynote appearance to the Minnesota Rural Partners Summit in July, 2005: http://www.crcworks.org/metersummit05.pdf.

To get a brief list of essential food facts, many of which are cited in the presentation above, http://www.crcworks.org/foodmarkets.pdf.

To link to further analysis of farm and food economies in the U.S.: http://www.crcworks.org/rural.html.

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