

Kern County's crop value hits a record \$7.5 billion

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Kern County's overall crop value reached a record \$7.5 billion in 2014, fueled by a robust year in grapes, almonds and dairy.

The county's agricultural gross value rose 12 percent from 2013 to 2014, said Ruben Arroyo, Kern County agricultural commissioner. Arroyo delivered the annual report to the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday.

Arroyo said that despite a lack of surface water, farmers were able to pump enough groundwater to keep their crops alive.

"If you just look at our top four crops, two of them are valued at more than a billion and two others are close to that," Arroyo said.

The county's top five crops – grapes, almonds, milk, citrus, and cattle and calves – dominate the region's agriculture. Combined, they make up 66 percent of Kern's total value. Grapes remained the top crop with a value of \$1.7 billion.

This is the second year Kern County has held the No. 2 spot of top-producing agriculture counties in the state. Tulare County, buoyed by its massive \$2.5 billion dairy industry, is No. 1 with \$8 billion in crop value.

Fresno County, once the reigning leader in farm values, will likely slip to No. 3. It will deliver its annual crop report in the coming weeks.

The state's historic drought has punished Fresno County perhaps the harshest. Thousands of acres have been pulled out of production as surface water supplies have dried up.

Meanwhile, Kern County has seen an increase in acres of tomatoes and garlic for the processing industry.

Garlic for processing doubled in acreage from 540 to 1,000 acres last year. Its value also more than doubled from \$2.5 million to \$5.4 million. Processing tomatoes also increased in value from \$40 million to \$66 million, and an additional 2,000 acres were planted last year.

Almonds continued their surge in the San Joaquin Valley. Kern County farmed almonds on nearly 200,000 acres last year, and another 9,000 are planted but not mature enough to produce nuts. The value of the crop broke the \$1 billion mark for the first time, jumping from \$992 million to \$1.5 billion in 2014.

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