

Oregon counties continue to rely on agriculture

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

All But Five Oregon Counties Report An Increase In Ag Sales

Thirty-one of Oregon's 36 counties reported an increase in agricultural sales last year according to preliminary statistics released by Oregon State University. Many counties reported dramatic growth in 2007 buoyed by high prices and good yields. The latest figures continue to emphasize the importance of agriculture to both the local and state economy. Oregon's total agricultural sales for 2007 is up more than 10 percent at nearly \$4.9 billion with 11 counties recording double digit increases this past year. Once again, the diversity of agriculture in Oregon resulted in winners and losers among various commodities. The mixed bag of results has changed the rank order of counties more than usual when it comes to 2007 gross farm and ranch sales. Still, the top ten list contains the same names:

1.

Marion County

\$614.7 million

2.

Clackamas County

\$409.9 million

3.

Umatilla County

\$358.4 million

4.

Washington County

\$351.3 million

5.

Morrow County

\$322.3 million

6.

Klamath County

\$298.3 million

7.

Yamhill County

\$296.1 million

8.

Linn County

\$295.0 million

9.

Malheur County

\$261.2 million

10.

Polk County

\$160.0 million

For the first time in recent memory, two of the top five counties are east of the Cascades. Umatilla County jumped from #4 to #3 while Morrow County moved up from #7 to #5. Washington County moved down from #3 to #4. Dropping out of the top five was Linn County to #8. In the second five, Klamath County saw the biggest jump in rankings, from #9 to #6 of all Oregon counties. All top ten counties saw increases in agricultural sales. Klamath (45 percent), Morrow (29 percent), and Umatilla (23 percent) had tremendous years. Polk and Washington (both 9 percent) saw a healthy sales increase followed by Yamhill (7 percent), Marion (5 percent), Malheur (4 percent), Linn (4 percent), and Clackamas (3 percent). Klamath County can attribute its meteoric rise to the price paid for some key commodities, including hay, cattle, and dairy

products. Morrow County saw nearly a 100 percent increase in the value of wheat sold in 2007 because of a big rise in prices. Corn for grain enjoyed higher prices and a dramatic increase in acreage. Potato prices and acreage jumped. Cattle and dairy also showed an increase this past year. Umatilla County rode the wave of historic prices for wheat and also saw a tremendous increase in corn for grain acreage. Apples, sweet cherries, and wine grapes in the Milton-Freewater area showed strong increases. Counties in the Willamette Valley may not have seen the huge overall rise in agricultural sales last year of their Eastern Oregon counterparts, but still had solid years. The state's number one agricultural commodity- greenhouse and nursery products- continued to do well, which boosted the economies of Marion, Clackamas, Washington, and Yamhill counties. Marion County, which remains Oregon's only county with more than a half billion dollars in agricultural sales- saw a relatively modest increase over 2006, but that still represents an increase of more than \$29 million. It can still be said that five of the top eight top agricultural counties in Oregon are within an hour's drive of Portland or Eugene- the state's two largest cities. Largely because of the spectacular showing by wheat and other grains in 2007, other counties east of the Cascades that are not part of the top ten recorded big jumps in agricultural sales. Sherman County (53 percent) moved from #30 to #26 while Gilliam County (45 percent) rose from #33 to #29. Union County (27 percent) was helped by wheat prices, hay prices, potato prices, and grass seed production. Other counties with notable increases last year include Curry (19 percent) and Coos (18 percent), which both benefitted from better cranberry production and prices, a hike in dairy prices, and an increase in sheep production. On the negative side, only five counties recorded a decrease in agricultural sales in 2007, and all of the drops were relatively modest. The largest decline was recorded by Josephine County (-5 percent) followed by Deschutes (-4 percent), Clatsop and Lincoln (both -2 percent), and Crook (-1 percent). One potential reason for the decrease in agricultural sales could be a loss in farm acreage caused by development. Josephine, Deschutes, and Crook counties have all seen population growth which appears to correspond to less agricultural production. About half of Oregon's agricultural production takes place in the Willamette Valley. Even heavily urban Multnomah County, at \$82 million in agricultural sales last year, is ranked in the upper half of all counties at #14. Still, the impact of agriculture remains even greater in rural Oregon as farming and ranching represent a larger percentage of the local economy. While the \$4.9 billion and 10 percent increase in agricultural sales last year was impressive, many analysts expect the 2008 county statistics to be even stronger as prices paid for grains and other commodities have increased even more over the first few months of this year. The statistics are always tempered with the increasing costs associated with agricultural production today. Still, the latest statistics continue to show that agriculture is a leading contributor to the state's overall economy.

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