Legislative Council Staff
Nonpartisan Services for Colorado's Legislature

Issue Brief
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A Snapshot of Colorado Agriculture

"Colorado is first in the nation for proso millet production, producing 64 percent of all proso millet sold in the United States in 2022."

As one of the top agricultural states in the United States, Colorado agriculture generates approximately $47 billion annually in economic activity. Agriculture in Colorado is made up of about 30 million acres of farmland, with approximately 36,000 different farm operations,[1] employing more than 195,000 people.[2] This issue brief gives an overview of agriculture in Colorado, including the Colorado Proud label, the wine industry in the state, and a map showing the economic value of agriculture in each county.

Colorado agriculture produces a wide variety of commodities

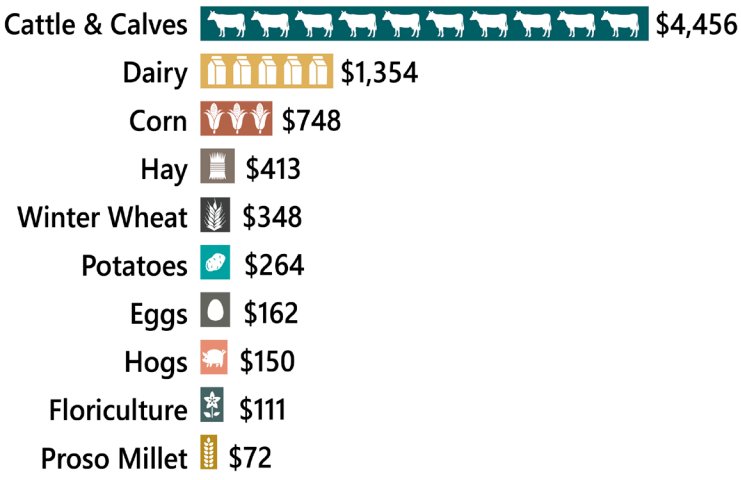


Field of proso millet

Colorado's landscape and environment contribute to the production of a wide variety of different commodities. Colorado is first in the nation for proso millet production, making up 64 percent of all proso millet sold in the United States in 2022.[3] This millet is used for gluten-free products, breads, birdseed, and animal seed. Among the 50 states, Colorado ranks in the top 10 producers of several other commodities, including cattle and calves, winter wheat, sheep and lambs, wool, alfalfa, potatoes, onions, apples, peaches, grapes, and lemons. About $2 billion worth of agricultural products are exported from Colorado every year.[4] Table 1 shows the top ten commodities based on cash receipts, or gross income from sales, in 2022.

Table 1. Top 10 Commodities in Colorado

($ in millions)



Source: Data from USDA. Graphic by Legislative Council Staff.

[1] *USDA Agricultural Census, 2022.*
[2] *Colorado Agriculture Brochure, Colorado Department of Agriculture.*
[3] *Economic Research Service, USDA.*
[4] *USDA Agricultural Census, 2022.*

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What is Colorado Proud?

The Colorado Department of Agriculture developed the Colorado Proud program in 1999. The marketing program aims to help consumers, restaurants, and retailers identify and purchase food and agricultural products that are locally grown, raised, and processed. Members of the Colorado Proud program include a wide variety of entities, ranging from farmers and ranchers to wineries and fisheries. Members are able to tap into the agricultural markets available in Colorado by utilizing Colorado Proud's advertising, marketing, public relations, and social media opportunities.[5]

The Colorado Proud Label

Products that are grown, raised, or processed in Colorado may display the Colorado Proud logo pictured here. The label is then easily identifiable for consumers at their local grocery store or farmers' market. Some of the most popular crops in Colorado include Palisade peaches, Rocky Ford melons, and Olathe sweet corn. Purchasing Colorado Proud products can help consumers enjoy fresher foods and support local economies.

Colorado's Wine Industry

While one may not think of Colorado as wine country, the state boasts several wine-making regions from the four corners to the eastern plains. Colorado's cold winters and high altitudes offer a unique environment for growing grapes compared to other areas of the country. The most common varieties of grapes include Riesling, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Cabernet Franc. There are currently two American Viticultural Areas (AVA) in Colorado – Grand Valley (75,990 acres) and West Elks (48,405 acres). Many other areas across Colorado produce grapes, but have not yet received the AVA designation from the federal Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau.

As of early 2022, approximately 145 wine producers, spread across 29 counties and totaling 201 acres of vineyard land,[6] produce about 2,100 tons of grapes, with Mesa and Delta counties as the top producers. These vineyards and wineries are primarily small, family operations averaging less than ten acres per operation producing less than 500 cases a year.[7]

The wine industry is a growing contributor to Colorado's economy

The wine industry itself, made up of wine production, distribution and sales, and wine tourism, is growing quickly. From 2014 to 2020, bottled wine production more than doubled, reaching 259,000 cases in 2020.

As of 2022, the industry supported approximately 28,000 jobs and contributed about $4 billion in total economic activity in Colorado. Wine tourism also has played a role in growing Colorado's role in the wine industry. These wineries see over 311,000 tourists annually, which results in approximately $105.7 million in annual tourism expenditures.[8]

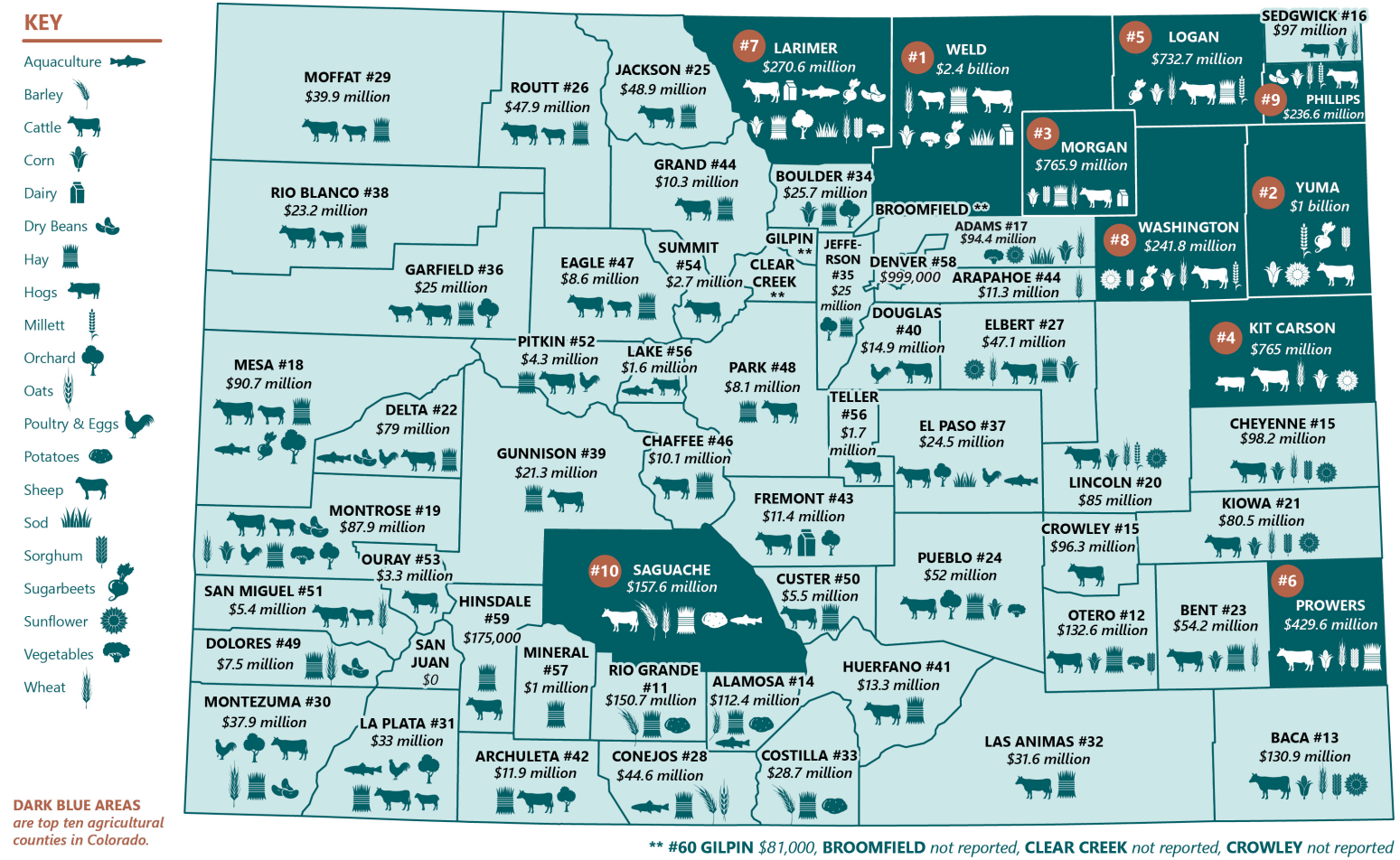
[5] *Colorado Proud.*
[6] *Colorado Economic Impact Study, WineAmerica, 2022.*
[7] *Colorado Wine Industry Economic Impact Study, 2021.*
[8] *Colorado Economic Impact Study, WineAmerica, 2022.*

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Agriculture is in every corner of Colorado

From rural lands to the east and west, to the urban corridor, agriculture plays a role in almost every county in Colorado. Figure 1 shows a map of the wide range of agriculture across the state and the value of agricultural products sold in each county as of 2022.

Figure 1. Agriculture Across Colorado: Key Commodities and the Market Value of Products Sold by County



Source: Data from *USDA 2022 Census of Agriculture*. Map by Legislative Council Staff.