

Organic crop production blooms in California

By Don Villarejo

RELIABLE MEASURES OF THE SIZE of California's rapidly growing organic farm industry are hard to find. In fact, prior to the enactment of the Organic Foods Act of 1990 there was no objective measure available. Under this act, organic farm operators are required to register their farm's operations with their county's agricultural commissioner. In 1993, thirty-two counties provided organic crop acreage or, in a few cases, organic crop values in their annual crop reports (see table below).¹

CIRS used these reports to compute

the fraction of each county's harvested crop acreage (or farm gate value) represented by reported organic crop production. Since Monterey and Yolo were the only counties to report both organic crop value and organic crop acreage, an average of the organic acreage-to-value ratios for the two counties was calculated and applied to the available information for each of the remaining thirty counties.

Based on these estimates, CIRS places the aggregate farm gate value of organic crop production in these thirty-two counties between \$83 million and \$317.5 million, with the actual value most like-

ly exceeding \$250 million. Because more than two dozen counties reported neither organic crop value nor organic crop acres, they were not considered in the calculations. As a result, it is likely that the total figure is somewhat larger.

Our approximation seems to be a reasonable one. According to Brian Baker of California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF), his organization estimates that its members, who represent one-third of California's organic farms, account for approximately \$80 million in commodity sales, leading to CCOF's estimate of \$240 million for total organic farm receipts. ♦

COUNTY	ALL CROPS		ORGANIC CROPS		
	VALUE ²	CROP ACRES ³	FARMS	VALUE	CROP ACRES
Tulare	\$2,568.9	776,015	N.A.	N.A.	3,500
Monterey	1,809.0	313,764	27	10.9	1,000
Kern	1,782.9	809,725	28	N.A.	4,876
San Diego	898.5	80,221	400+	4.3	N.A.
Ventura	823.0	121,886	24	N.A.	1,143
San Joaquin	805.4	544,800	6	N.A.	269
Merced	670.1	555,455	21	N.A.	753
Kings	530.6	512,949	1	N.A.	38
Madera	519.5	309,073	16	N.A.	1,931
Santa Barbara	453.4	54,770	N.A.	N.A.	4,500
Butte	267.1	206,308	51	N.A.	1,559
San Luis Obispo	258.0	206,353	68	N.A.	2,437
Santa Cruz	237.1	21,365	50	2.0	N.A.
Yolo	225.8	355,152	N.A.	2.7	1,242
Glenn	202.7	241,301	26	N.A.	1,095
San Mateo	202.4	9,795	9	N.A.	111
Los Angeles	198.6	16,353	20	N.A.	143
Sonoma	184.7	82,539	472	N.A.	3,541
14 small counties	758.7	596,981	332	N.A.	5,490

¹ Six other counties reported a total of 82 organic farms, but provided neither organic crop acreage nor value of production.

² Crop values are expressed in millions.

³ Only crop acreage figures have been included; livestock production has been excluded.