Citrus Production

Manatee County ranks 10th in the state in citrus acreage with 24,247 acres and over 3.1 million trees. Since the 1980s, growers have faced many threats such as unfavorable weather, the Med fly, citrus diseases (including citrus canker and greening), highly variable fruit prices, and conversion of land from agriculture to urban use. Research done by the University of Florida has assisted growers in preserving their crops and providing alternative enterprises to assist in recovering some of their losses.

Manatee County fruit is produced primarily for processing into juice or concentrate. Early and mid-season oranges comprise about 59% of the crop. Late season Valencia oranges total 37%, with the remaining 4% made up of grapefruit, tangerine, and tangelo varieties. Citrus by-products, including citrus peel, are made into cattle feed, oils, flavors and essences. Manatee County is home to Tropicana, which is one of the state’s largest processors. Tropicana juice is sold around the world.

Forest Products

Forest land in Manatee County is diminishing at an ever increasing rate. At the turn of the century (1900), when a large portion of Manatee County was owned by various timber companies, the turpentine industries boomed. In the late 1920s, several state-of-the-art sawmills were in operation. Today, there are 1,283 acres in pine timber lands in Manatee County. Although the economic impact is hard to estimate, the last comprehensive survey was completed in 1990 and showed an overall impact of over $5 million.

Agriculture has always been, and continues to be, a stable force and a major contributor to the economy of Manatee County. More than 313,485 acres in Manatee County are now in production agriculture - including crops, pasture land, citrus, nursery, and reforestation. Today 794 farms call Manatee County home, with an average farm size of 284 acres. Crop production currently accounts for over $183.6 million in exports with an estimated 30,000 jobs related to the areas of agriculture and natural resources.

The total value of agriculture’s economic impact in Manatee County is estimated at $646 million. Manatee County currently ranks 7th among Florida’s 67 counties in agricultural sales. Agriculture here is not only large and diverse, but is carried out in one of the most complex areas in the nation, with an abundance of pest and weather problems, increasing urbanization, foreign competition, and state and federal rules and regulations. We continue to lose agricultural land as it is being converted to development and residential use to meet the housing needs of the approximately 327,000 people who call Manatee County home. In spite of these challenges, it continues to thrive.

**Information obtained from FDACS 2011 Agricultural Statistics & 2007 Census of Agriculture, Manatee County**
Vegetable Crop Production

In Manatee County, vegetable production is still the number one agricultural enterprise. There are approximately 55,700 acres grown each year at an annual farm-gate value of over $290 million. That is not counting the $193.9 million economic contribution from value added products. Tomatoes are “king,” with about 12,000 acres grown during the 2011 season. In 1950, 191 farms grew 2,234 acres of tomatoes. In 2007, 22 farms grew 16,576 acres of tomatoes. This is possible with the help and research from Florida’s Land Grant Universities. Manatee and Hillsborough counties produce approximately 40% of the tomatoes grown in Florida, which in turn produces over 70% of all fresh market tomatoes grown in the U.S. Potatoes, cabbage, watermelon, peppers, cucumbers, snap beans, squash, and others add another 16,000 acres.

Historically, vegetable packinghouses were built along the rail lines as this was the primary method of transporting fresh tomatoes out of the county. Packinghouses in Manatee County pack and ship everything from tomatoes (round, roma, cherry and grape), to peppers, cucumbers, and cantaloupe.

Ornamental Horticulture

Ornamental horticulture is a major component of the agriculture industry in Manatee County, ranking third behind vegetable crops and fruit production. The county ranks 13th in the state in market value of ornamentals with nursery stock and floriculture/foliage crops making up the bulk of ornamental commodities. Most nursery stock is grown on 3,642 acres and is valued at over $19 million. The sod industry accounts for 2,300 acres and $3 million in market value. Floriculture crops such as bedding plants, cut flowers and greenery, and foliage plants are mainly produced in greenhouses or other covered structures with sales estimated at nearly $13 million. Florida leads the nation in sales of potted foliage for indoor use and hanging baskets.

Livestock and Forage Production

Manatee County utilizes over 196,507 acres in the livestock production business. Livestock enterprises consist of beef (cow-calf production), dairy, horses and other animals. Estimates currently include over 36,000 head of beef cattle, 3,300 head of dairy cattle and 1,500 horses. Horse farms comprise 227 acres in Manatee County. Sheep, goats and llamas are considered hobby livestock, primarily raised on ranchettes. We rank 9th in the state in number of beef cattle with annual market receipts of over $21 million. The county ranks 8th in the state in dairy production with annual receipts of over $11 million. The estimated value of hobby livestock is over $3.5 million, bringing the total value of the livestock industry to over $35 million. This is not counting the $12.4 million in value added economic contributions the livestock industry brings to Manatee County.

Feed production consists of semi- to well-improved pastures. Over 8,200 acres of hay and 2,500 acres of silage and haylage are produced each year. There are over 460 beef producers and 3 dairies which average over 1,100 head each.

Commercial Fishing

Manatee County commercial fishermen annually harvest over 3 million pounds of fish valued at over $5 million with a value added economic contribution of $3.7 million annually.

Grouper and snapper remain important offshore fishing species. Most grouper are harvested from deeper waters (greater than 100 feet) off the west Florida continental shelf. Bait shrimping also remains an important fishery. Additionally, small quantities of food shrimp, stone crab and blue crab are harvested. However, Cortez continues to struggle to maintain its heritage as a working waterfront.