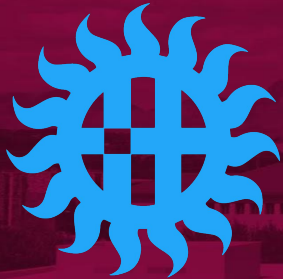


*Las Cruces Museums: Pull Up a Chair Series*

# Agriculture in Southern New Mexico

NMSU Cooperative Extension Service

**Jason Banegas**  
Extension Economist



**The City of  
Las Cruces**

**NM  
STATE  
UNIVERSITY**



**Agricultural Economics  
& Agricultural Business**

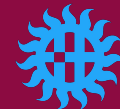
**BE BOLD.** Shape the Future.

# Overview

- NM Agriculture and Economics
- Southern NM and Doña Ana County Agriculture
- Pecans in New Mexico and Doña Ana County
- Agricultural Labor History
- Trends and Challenges in Agriculture



BE BOLD. Shape the Future.



The City of Las Cruces

# Agriculture in New Mexico

- Total agriculture cash receipts in 2023 totaled \$3.99 billion, up 4% from 2022.
- Livestock product receipts up 3% to \$3.09 billion in 2023.
  - Cattle - \$1.7 billion
  - Dairy Products - \$1.2 billion
- Crop value increased 5% to \$898 million.
  - Pecans were third largest cash commodity at \$189 million.
  - Hay ranked fourth at \$145 million
  - Onions were fifth at \$137 million



## Cash Receipts – New Mexico: 2020-2023

Commodity	2020	2021	2022	2023
	(\$1,000)			
All Commodities .....	3,097,292	3,259,559	3,844,241	3,987,250
Animals & Products.....	2,372,390	2,400,492	2,987,242	3,089,561
Meat Animals .....	964,515	1,056,234	1,171,281	1,715,170
Cattle & Calves .....	964,030	1,055,600	1,170,360	1,714,790 1st
Hogs & Pigs .....	485	634	921	380
Dairy Products: Milk.....	1,319,974	1,258,686	1,668,500	1,233,180 2nd
Poultry & Eggs.....	46,959	45,033	106,313	100,625
Miscellaneous Animals & Products .....	40,943	40,539	41,148	40,586
Honey .....	657	702	1,239	1,318
Mohair.....	38	35	46	38
Wool.....	1,080	1,111	998	825
Crops .....	724,902	859,067	856,999	897,688
Food Grains Wheat.....	15,985	19,796	13,706	7,211
Feed Crops.....	133,221	148,609	155,978	182,471
Corn.....	30,969	36,093	37,107	37,277
Hay.....	102,252	112,516	118,871	145,195 4th
Sorghum .....	NA	NA	NA	NA
Cotton .....	33,895	44,797	50,236	47,564
Cotton Lint, Long Staple .....	4,558	14,426	18,537	19,873
Cotton Lint, Upland.....	23,484	23,636	23,062	19,397
Cottonseed.....	5,852	6,734	8,637	8,294
Peanuts .....	3,791	11,424	7,904	7,245
Vegetables & Melons.....	171,622	173,209	203,381	178,872
Onions.....	121,565	128,180	155,487	137,412 5th
Chile Peppers.....	50,057	45,029	47,894	41,460
Pecans.....	128,388	197,040	147,231	189,200 3rd
All Other Crops.....	238,000	264,286	261,879	269,059

Data as of February 6, 2025.

NA indicates that insufficient data exists to forecast cash receipts for that commodity, and the amounts are instead included in the aggregate forecast totals.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service



BE BOLD. Shape the Future.



The City of Las Cruces

2024 NEW MEXICO  
**Agricultural  
Statistics**



**New Mexico Agricultural Statistics  
2024 Annual Bulletin**

*Compiled by the*  
United States Department of Agriculture  
National Agricultural Statistics Service  
Mountain Regional Field Office

Rodger Ott, Regional Director  
P.O. BOX 150969  
Lakewood, CO 80215-0969

(800) 392-3202  
Fax (866) 314-4029  
[www.nass.usda.gov/nm](http://www.nass.usda.gov/nm)

*Issued cooperatively by:*

State of New Mexico  
Department of Agriculture  
Jeff M. Witte, Director/Secretary

and

United States Department of Agriculture  
National Agricultural Statistics Service  
Joseph Parsons, Administrator

---

**FRONT COVER PHOTOS BY:  
New Mexico Public Education Department**

---



USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.



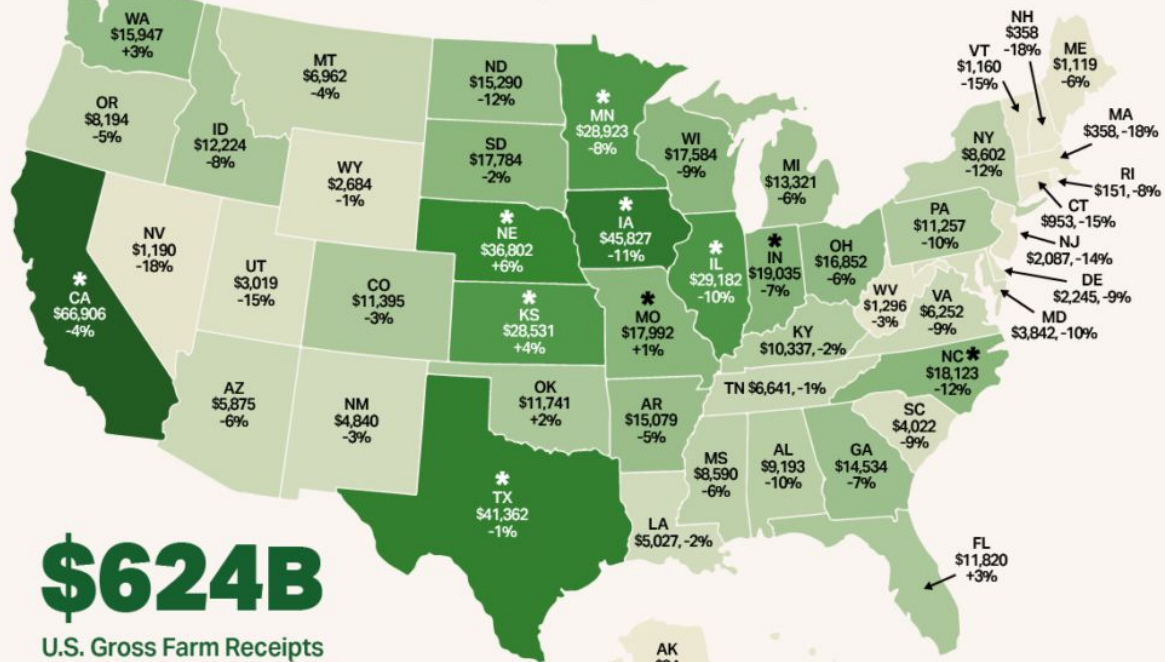
**BE BOLD.** Shape the Future.



**The City of Las Cruces**

# Map 1: Gross Farm Income

## Inflation-Adjusted Gross Cash Farm Income for 2023, Million Dollars, and Percentage Change from 2022



Sources: USDA ERS September 2024 Farm Sector Income Forecast, Terrain

<https://www.terrainag.com/insights/first-look-2023-farm-profitability-by-state/>



BE BOLD. Shape the Future.



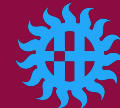
The City of Las Cruces

# Agriculture in New Mexico

- Farmers and ranchers purchased \$3.25 billion of inputs in 2023 to produce crops and livestock.
  - Livestock purchases - \$776 million.
  - Livestock feed - \$764 million.
  - Petroleum fuel and oil costs - \$118 million.
  - Repair and maintenance of capital items - \$130 million.



BE BOLD. Shape the Future.



The City of Las Cruces

# Economic Value of Agriculture

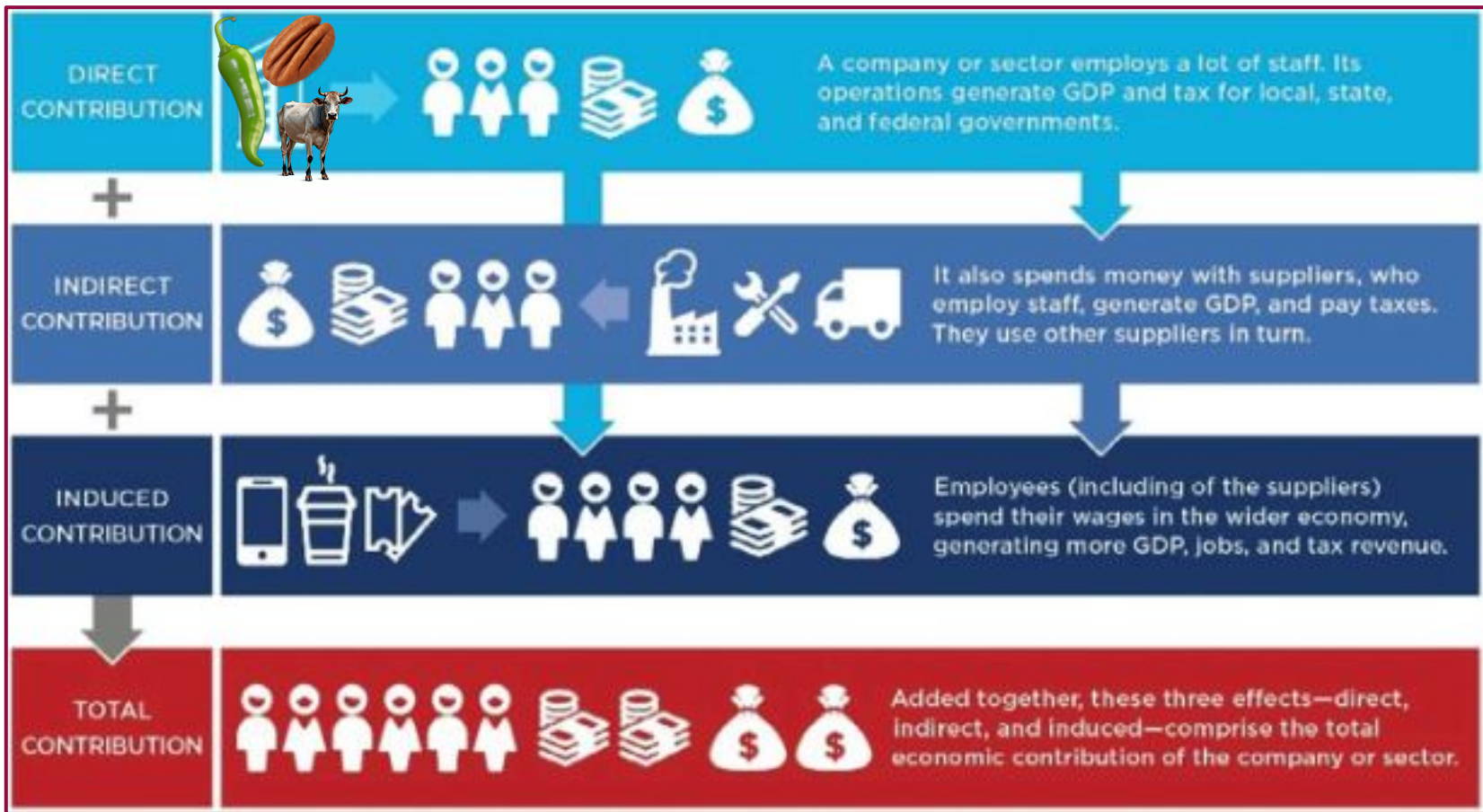
- Direct contributions: The value of production, the jobs and employee compensation it creates, and the local and state taxes generated.
- Indirect contributions: The economic impact of producers and their suppliers buying goods and services (inputs) from local (state of New Mexico) industries.
- Induced Effects: Occur through re-spending of income received by owners of the labor inputs



BE BOLD. Shape the Future.



The City of Las Cruces



<https://www.bicmagazine.com/industry/commodities/understanding-economic-impact-us-refineries/>



**BE BOLD.** Shape the Future.



**The City of Las Cruces**

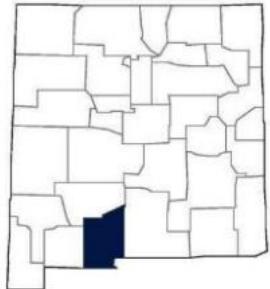
# Key Ag in South Central New Mexico

- Cattle, Dairy,  
Pecans, Chile,  
Cotton, Hay,  
and Onions



S. SOUTH CENTRAL	DIR. EMPL. IMPACT	TOT. EMPL. IMPACT	OUTPUT DIRECT \$ IMPACT	OUTPUT TOTAL \$ IMPACT	\$ RANK
Federal Govt. Non-military	7,255	11,066	848,863,831	1,294,796,767	1
State & Local Govt. Education	15,410	23,229	844,259,521	1,272,617,206	2
Federal Govt. Military	4,769	6,511	679,694,885	927,966,124	3
<b>AG PRODUCTION</b>	<b>4,272</b>	<b>5,748</b>	<b>614,514,662</b>	<b>841,347,200</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>FOOD PROCESSING</b>	<b>1,031</b>	<b>1,498</b>	<b>490,915,594</b>	<b>732,678,159</b>	<b>6</b>
Health Services - Non-hospitals	3,838	5,881	387,642,883	594,104,010	7
Hospitals - Private	3,173	4,716	372,887,024	554,114,572	8
Food & Drinking Places	7,549	10,385	398,321,655	547,909,010	9
Construction - New Non-residential	3,224	4,610	361,664,886	517,233,008	10

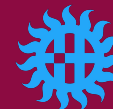
# Agriculture in Doña Ana County

Census 2022		Doña Ana County		Livestock- Jan 1, 2025		
				(head)		
Number of Farms	1,990			Cattle & Calves	40,000	
Land in Farms (acres)	713,474			Beef Cows	5,800	
Avg. Size of Farm	359			Milk Cows	13,800	
Value of Products Sold	\$320,612,000			Sheep & Lambs	1,100	
Avg. Farm Value Sold	\$161,112					
Avg. Farm Expenses	\$125,358					
Avg. Net Farm Income	\$44,491					
		Crops 2024	Acres Harvested	Yield	Production	Unit
		Hay, Alfalfa	7,100	8.30	59,000	(tons)
		Pecans <sup>1</sup>	30,200	1,820	55,000	(1,000 pounds)

<sup>1</sup> Bearing acreage.



BE BOLD. Shape the Future.



The City of Las Cruces



## Dona Ana County New Mexico



### Total and Per Farm Overview, 2022 and change since 2017

	2022	% change since 2017
Number of farms	1,990	+2
Land in farms (acres)	713,474	+35
Average size of farm (acres)	359	+32
<b>Total</b>	<b>(\$)</b>	
Market value of products sold	320,612,000	-13
Government payments	6,887,000	+1091
Farm-related income	10,499,000	+28
Total farm production expenses	249,462,000	-16
Net cash farm income	88,537,000	+9

Per farm average (\$)		
Market value of products sold	161,112	-15
Government payments <sup>a</sup>	52,177	+604
Farm-related income <sup>a</sup>	30,257	+42
Total farm production expenses	125,358	-18
Net cash farm income	44,491	+7

### Farms by Value of Sales

Number	Percent of Total <sup>b</sup>
Less than \$2,500	803
\$2,500 to \$4,999	312
\$5,000 to \$9,999	305
\$10,000 to \$24,999	205
\$25,000 to \$49,999	103
\$50,000 to \$99,999	67
\$100,000 or more	195

### Farms by Size

Number	Percent of Total <sup>b</sup>
1 to 9 acres	1,431
10 to 49 acres	307
50 to 179 acres	122
180 to 499 acres	57
500 to 999 acres	31
1,000+ acres	42

**11** Percent of state agriculture sales

### Share of Sales by Type (%)

Crops	71
Livestock, poultry, and products	29

### Land in Farms by Use (acres)

Cropland	80,104
Pastureland	612,337
Woodland	591
Other	20,442

Acres irrigated: 62,928

9% of land in farms

### Land Use Practices (% of farms)

No till	6
Reduced till	6
Intensive till	8
Cover crop	5



United States Department of Agriculture  
National Agricultural Statistics Service

[www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus](http://www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus)

### Market Value of Agricultural Products Sold

	Sales (\$1,000)	Rank in State <sup>c</sup>	Counties Producing Item	Rank in U.S. <sup>c</sup>	Counties Producing Item
<b>Total</b>	<b>320,612</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>455</b>	<b>3,078</b>
<b>Crops</b>	<b>227,640</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>296</b>	<b>3,074</b>
Grains, oilseeds, dry beans, dry peas	6,381	7	29	1,698	2,917
Tabacco	-	-	-	-	267
Cotton and cottonseed	15,667	2	10	128	647
Vegetables, melons, potatoes, sweet potatoes	40,235	3	30	96	2,831
Fruits, tree nuts, berries	133,092	1	31	37	2,711
Nursery, greenhouse, floriculture, sod	18,813	1	29	182	2,680
Cultivated Christmas trees, short rotation woody crops	-	-	8	-	1,274
Other crops and hay	13,452	5	32	256	3,035
<b>Livestock, poultry, and products</b>	<b>92,973</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>714</b>	<b>3,076</b>
Poultry and eggs	(D)	5	33	1,343	3,027
Cattle and calves	11,080	19	32	1,203	3,047
Milk from cows	79,291	5	16	155	1,770
Hogs and pigs	(D)	11	28	(D)	2,614
Sheep, goats, wool, mohair, milk	171	13	32	1,080	2,067
Horses, ponies, mules, burros, donkeys	1,514	3	32	183	2,907
Aquaculture	(D)	15	15	361	1,190
Other animals and animal products	800	3	30	281	2,909

### Producers <sup>d</sup>

3,497

<b>Sex</b>	
Male	2,181
Female	1,316
<b>Age</b>	
<35	162
35 - 64	1,711
65 and older	1,624

<b>Race</b>	
American Indian/Alaska Native	46
Asian	54
Black or African American	16
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	4
White	3,331
More than one race	46

<b>Other characteristics</b>	
Hispanic, Latino, Spanish origin	1,630
With military service	495
New and beginning farmers	937

### Percent of farms that:

Have internet access **78**

Farm organically **1**

Sell directly to consumers **8**

Hire farm labor **22**

Are family farms **94**

### Top Crops in Acres <sup>e</sup>

Pecans, all	38,546
Forage (hay/haylage), all	11,581
Cotton, all	9,866
Vegetables harvested, all	4,041
Corn for silage/greenchop	2,474

### Livestock Inventory (Dec 31, 2022)

Broilers and other meat-type chickens	144
Cattle and calves	41,400
Goats	974
Hogs and pigs	43
Horses and ponies	2,217
Layers	5,989
Pullets	167
Sheep and lambs	1,421
Turkeys	255

<sup>a</sup> Average per farm receiving. <sup>b</sup> May not add to 100% due to rounding. <sup>c</sup> Among counties whose rank can be displayed. <sup>d</sup> Data collected for a maximum of four producers per farm. <sup>e</sup> Crop commodity names may be shortened; see full names at [www.nass.usda.gov/ipicropnames.pdf](http://www.nass.usda.gov/ipicropnames.pdf). <sup>f</sup> Position below the line does not indicate rank. (D) Withheld to avoid disclosing data for individual operations. (NA) Not available. (Z) Less than half of the unit shown. (-) Represents zero.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.



BE BOLD. Shape the Future.



Agricultural Economics & Agricultural Business



The City of Las Cruces



Feed Crops	
Corn	
Hay	
Sorghum	
Cotton	
Cotton Lint, Long Staple	
Cotton Lint, Upland	
Cottonseed	
Peanuts	
Vegetables & Melons	
Onions	
Chile Peppers	
Pecans	
All Other Crops	

Data as of February 6, 2025.  
 NA indicates that insufficient data exists to forecast  
 forecast totals.  
 Source: USDA, Economic Research Service



	2022	2023
	3,844,241	3,987,250
	2,987,242	3,089,561
	1,171,281	1,715,170
	1,170,360	1,714,790
	921	380
	1,668,500	1,233,180
	106,313	100,625
	41,148	40,586
	1,239	1,318
	46	38
		825
		897,688
		7,211
		182,471
		37,277
		145,195
		NA
		47,564
		19,873
		19,397
		8,294
		7,245
		178,872
		137,412
		41,460
		189,200
		269,059

the aggregate

## NM AG in 2012

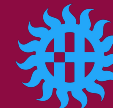
- The total value of the agricultural sector's production increased from \$2.9 billion in 2009 (a poor year because of dairy losses) to **\$4.26 billion in 2012**—up 47%
- The value of livestock production increased 56% from 2009 to **2012 to \$3.14 billion**, primarily due to increased milk and cattle prices.
- The value of crop production increased 29% from 2009 to **2012 to \$823 million**
- New Mexico's top six agricultural commodities accounted for 89% of total agricultural revenues:
  - cattle and calves (\$1.751 billion)
  - dairy products (\$1.409 billion)
  - hay (\$172.3 million)
  - **pecans (\$110.5 million)**
  - chile (\$65.4 million)
  - **onions (\$56.1 million)**



NMSU Extension Publication: Circular 675 - Agriculture's Contribution to New Mexico's Economy



BE BOLD. Shape the Future.

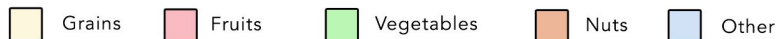


The City of Las Cruces

# The Most Lucrative Food Crop In Each State



Each state is colored according to the type of crop produced within its borders that was the most valuable in 2012....



Created by Joe Satran of The Huffington Post. Data Source: USDA/NASS, HuffPost Calculations



BE BOLD. Shape the Future.



The City of Las Cruces

# Pecans in New Mexico



- Pecan production in New Mexico totaled 84.80 million pounds in 2024,
  - down 22.70 million pounds from 2023,
  - but once again ranking New Mexico second in the nation in pecan production.
- Growers received \$1.97 per pound, on average, for their pecans, up 12 percent from the previous year.

# Economic Pillars – Pecan Industry



## County Estimates: Pecans – New Mexico: 2022–2024

County <sup>1</sup>	Bearing Acres			Harvested Yield			Utilized Production		
	2022 (acres)	2023 (acres)	2024 (acres)	2022 (pounds)	2023 (pounds)	2024 (pounds)	2022 (1,000 pounds)	2023 (1,000 pounds)	2024 (1,000 pounds)
Chaves .....	4,100	4,100	4,250	1,500	3,200	2,080	6,150	13,120	8,820
<b>Doña Ana .....</b>	<b>32,500</b>	<b>33,500</b>	<b>30,200</b>	<b>1,610</b>	<b>2,320</b>	<b>1,820</b>	<b>52,200</b>	<b>77,620</b>	<b>55,000</b>
Lea .....	(D)	(D)	500	(D)	(D)	1,180	(D)	(D)	590
Luna .....	(D)	(D)	2,300	(D)	(D)	1,890	(D)	(D)	4,350
Otero .....	1,700	1,700	1,700	1,560	1,720	1,330	2,650	2,930	2,260
Sierra.....	500	500	890	2,360	1,600	2,220	1,180	800	1,980
Other Counties ...	10,200	10,200	9,160	1,540	1,280	1,290	15,720	13,030	11,800
<b>New Mexico .....</b>	<b>49,000</b>	<b>50,000</b>	<b>49,000</b>	<b>1,590</b>	<b>2,150</b>	<b>1,730</b>	<b>77,900</b>	<b>107,500</b>	<b>84,800</b>

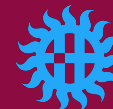
(D) Withheld to avoid disclosing data for individual operations.

<sup>1</sup> Counties with missing data are included in "Other Counties."

**2024 NM State Ag Overview lists Pecans at \$1.97/LB  
= \$108.3 Million for Doña Ana County Production**



**BE BOLD.** Shape the Future.



**The City of Las Cruces**

# How'd They Get Here?

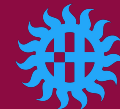
## A Very Brief History of Pecans

- Pecan (*Carya illinoensis*) is one of the better-known pecan hickories.
- Pecan are native to the lower Mississippi Valley. Within this region it extends westward to eastern Kansas and central Texas, eastward to western Mississippi and western Tennessee.
- Pecan also grows locally throughout northeastern and central Mexico

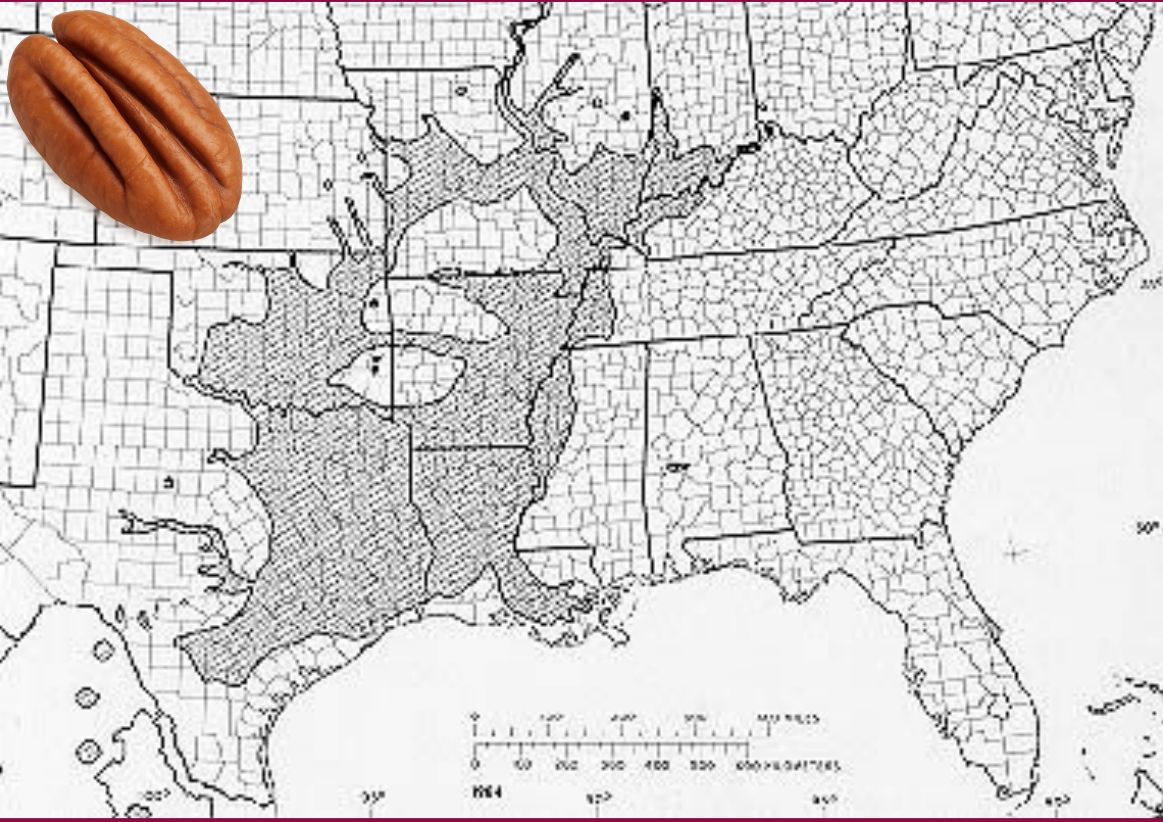
[https://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/misc/ag\\_654/volume\\_2/carya/illinoesis.htm](https://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/misc/ag_654/volume_2/carya/illinoesis.htm)



BE BOLD. Shape the Future.



The City of Las Cruces



- In its range where Spanish is spoken, nogal morado or nuez encarcelada, nuez de la arruga, nueces de pecán, pacana, etc. There are many indigenous words for the pecan as well.
- These native pecans were and continue to be highly valued as sources of new varieties and as stock for selected clones.
- Besides the commercial edible nut that it produces, the pecan provides food for wildlife.
- Pecans are an excellent multipurpose tree for the home landscape by providing a source of nuts, furniture-grade wood, and esthetic value.

[https://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/misc/ag\\_654/volume\\_2/carya/illinoesis.htm](https://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/misc/ag_654/volume_2/carya/illinoesis.htm)



**BE BOLD.** Shape the Future.



**The City of Las Cruces**

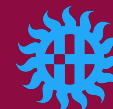
# Origins of Pecans in Doña Ana County

- There is evidence that some were brought to the area from central Texas and north-central Mexico in the late 1800s or early 1900s.

*Herrera, NMSU Extension Guide H-626*



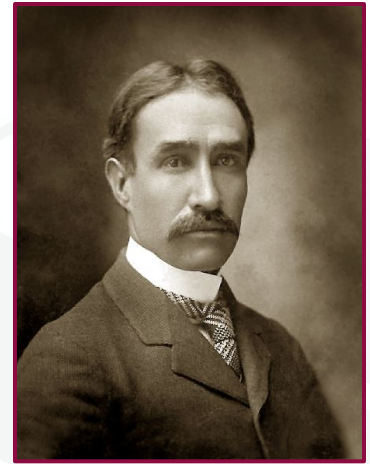
**BE BOLD.** Shape the Future.



**The City of Las Cruces**

# Origins of Pecans in Doña Ana County

- **1910s:** Fabian Garcia, the first director of the New Mexico Agricultural Experiment Station, planted some of the first pecan trees in the Mesilla Valley.
- Many of these original trees are still standing at NMSU's Fabian Garcia Horticultural Science Center.



# Origins of Pecans in Doña Ana County

- One of the early pioneers of pecan promotion in the Mesilla Valley was J.W. Newberry of Fairacres, NM. Newberry grew, propagated, and sold pecan trees.
- **1930s:** The first large-scale planting of pecans was made by Deane Stahmann. This 30-acre planting was on the Snow Ranch, a farm south of Las Cruces.

*Herrera, NMSU Extension Guide H-626*



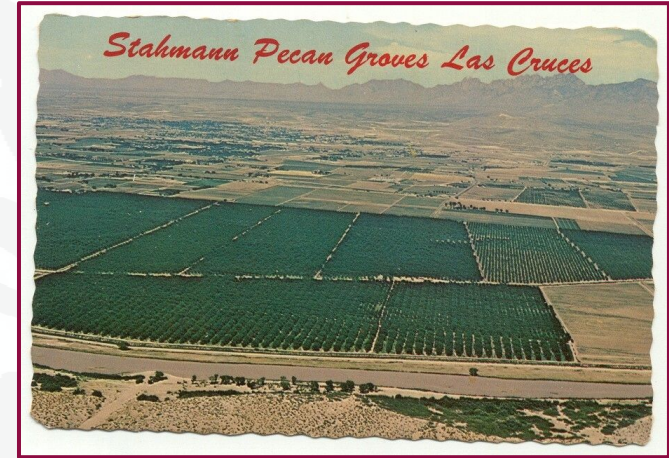
**BE BOLD.** Shape the Future.



**The City of Las Cruces**

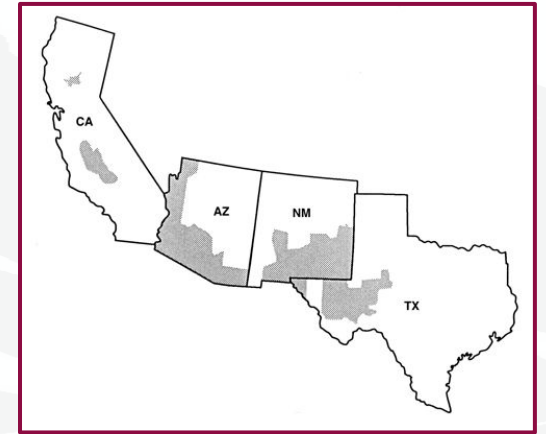
# Origins of Pecans in Doña Ana County

- Stahmann eventually planted ~4,000 acres of trees along the Rio Grande, a few miles from Fabian Garcia's original plantings.
- Many of Stahmann's innovations, particularly with regards to pruning, are common practice among pecan growers in the west today.



# Growth & Expansion of Pecans

- **1920:** Just 626 lbs of pecan production recorded in New Mexico.
- **1960s:** About 6,000 acres of pecan orchards existed in NM driven primarily by Stahmann Farm expansion.
- **1992:** The western region (which includes NM) produced over 100 million pounds of top-quality pecans
- **2024:** 30,200 acres of pecans (55,000,000#) harvested in Doña Ana County.



# An Economic Engine in Doña Ana County

- Pecans are one of Southern NM's signature commodities.
- Doña Ana County is the largest pecan-producing county in the U.S.
  - ~21% of national output (55 of 265 Million # in 2024)



# Pecan Labor Impact in Doña Ana County

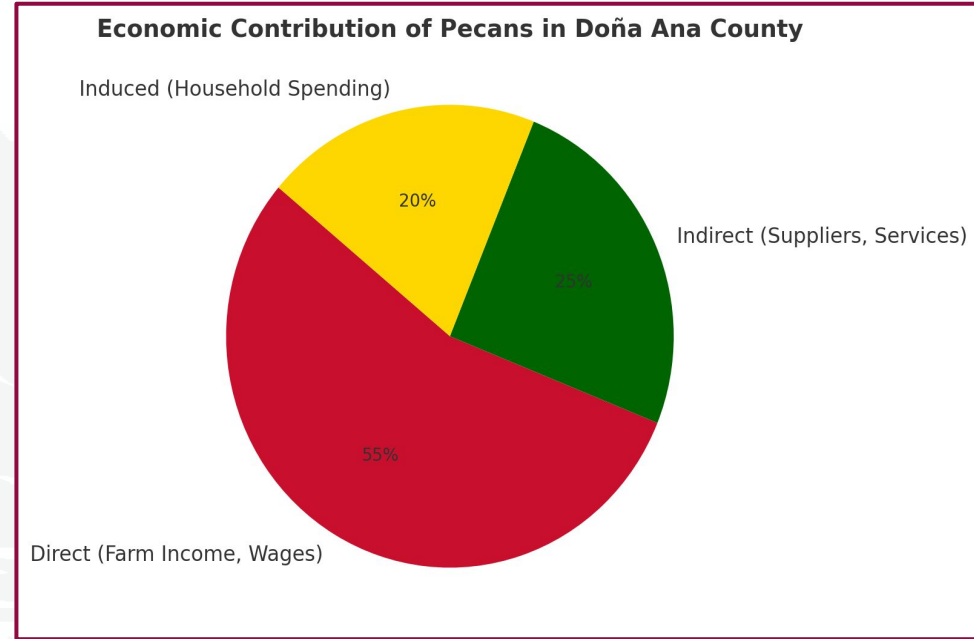
- Highly labor-intensive crop: orchard maintenance, harvest, shelling, processing.
- Supports thousands of seasonal and permanent jobs, many tied to migrant and H-2A workers.



# Pecan Ripple Effects in Doña Ana County



- Direct effects: wages, farm income, export sales.
- Indirect effects: input purchases (irrigation, equipment, fertilizers).
- Induced effects: household spending in retail, housing, healthcare.



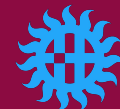
# Pecan Ripple Effects in Doña Ana County

- Every \$1 of pecan output generates ~\$1.80–\$2.00 in total economic activity *(NMSU Circular CR-675)*.

**Pecans are not just a crop, they are a cornerstone of Southern NM's economy, sustaining families, communities, and regional trade.**



**BE BOLD.** Shape the Future.



**The City of Las Cruces**

# Historical Agricultural Labor in Southern New Mexico

- Before large-scale irrigation, farming in the Mesilla Valley relied on acequia systems dating back to Spanish and Pueblo times. These canals supported small grains, alfalfa, and subsistence crops but were limited by seasonal river flow and droughts.
- **1906:**, the U.S. and Mexico signed the Rio Grande Project Treaty, allocating water between the two countries. This was followed by the creation of the Elephant Butte Dam by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (completed 1916) and an extensive canal system.
- Irrigation in Mesilla Valley agriculture expanded and set the stage for labor-intensive specialty crops.



# Historical Agricultural Labor in Southern New Mexico

- **1921:** Fabián García standardizes chile with New Mexico No. 9, catalyzing a commercial chile industry that would rely on large seasonal crews for field work and hand harvest.
- **1930s:** Pecans grown at scale and orchards are labor-intensive year-round

Chile and pecan orchards created seasonal employment and anchored a multi-national workforce that shaped language, culture, and community institutions in the Mesilla Valley.



# Historical Agricultural Labor in Southern New Mexico

## Historical Timeline of Irrigation & Agriculture in the Mesilla Valley



**Pre-1500s**

Pre-Columbian & Pueblo  
(Acequia traditions,  
subsistence farming)

**1600s-1800s**

Spanish Colonial Era  
(acequia expansion,  
introduction of wheat,  
orchards, livestock)

**Late 1800s**

Late 1800s  
(Railroads connect markets,  
small-scale irrigated crops)

**1906**

1906 Rio Grande Treaty  
(U.S. & Mexico water sharing)

**1916**

1916 Elephant Butte Dam  
(completion, reliable irrigation)

**1920s-30s**

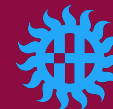
1920s-30s Crop Expansion  
(Cotton, chile, pecans rise,  
more labor-intensive farming)



**BE BOLD.** Shape the Future.



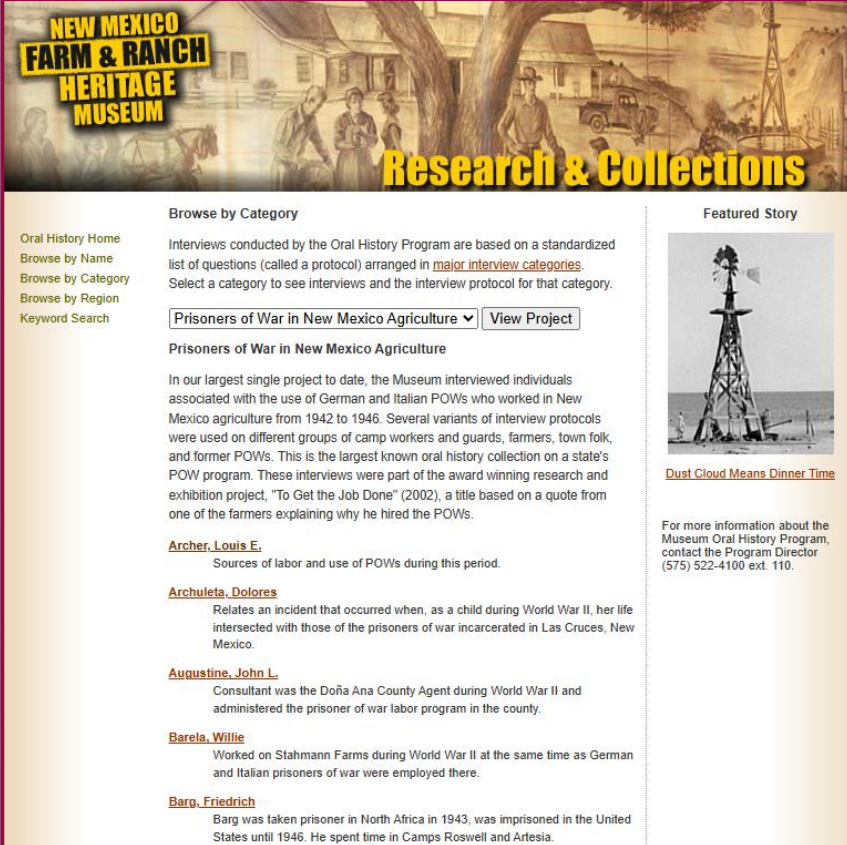
Agricultural Economics  
& Agricultural Business



**The City of Las Cruces**

# WWII Era Ag Labor in Southern New Mexico

- **World War II labor shortage:**  
Local Farms used German and Italian POW labor alongside local crews.



**NEW MEXICO FARM & RANCH HERITAGE MUSEUM**

## Research & Collections

**Browse by Category**

Interviews conducted by the Oral History Program are based on a standardized list of questions (called a protocol) arranged in [major interview categories](#). Select a category to see interviews and the interview protocol for that category.

### Prisoners of War in New Mexico Agriculture

In our largest single project to date, the Museum interviewed individuals associated with the use of German and Italian POWs who worked in New Mexico agriculture from 1942 to 1946. Several variants of interview protocols were used on different groups of camp workers and guards, farmers, town folk, and former POWs. This is the largest known oral history collection on a state's POW program. These interviews were part of the award winning research and exhibition project, "To Get the Job Done" (2002), a title based on a quote from one of the farmers explaining why he hired the POWs.

**Archer, Louis E.**  
Sources of labor and use of POWs during this period.


**Archuleta, Dolores**  
Relates an incident that occurred when, as a child during World War II, her life intersected with those of the prisoners of war incarcerated in Las Cruces, New Mexico.

**Augustine, John L.**  
Consultant was the Doña Ana County Agent during World War II and administered the prisoner of war labor program in the county.

**Barela, Willie**  
Worked on Stahmann Farms during World War II at the same time as German and Italian prisoners of war were employed there.

**Barg, Friedrich**  
Barg was taken prisoner in North Africa in 1943, was imprisoned in the United States until 1946. He spent time in Camps Roswell and Artesia.

**Featured Story**



[Dust Cloud Means Dinner Time](#)

For more information about the Museum Oral History Program, contact the Program Director (575) 522-4100 ext. 110.



BE BOLD. Shape the Future.



The City of Las Cruces

# Bracero Program in Southern New Mexico

- **Bracero Program (1942–1964)**

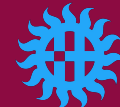
- During World War II, The Bracero Program was an agreement between the United States and Mexico allowing farmers into the U.S. to remedy agricultural labor shortages.
- Despite enduring discrimination, hazardous work and living conditions, and poor compensation, tens of thousands of braceros arrived annually to fulfill the demands of chile, onion, cotton, and orchard work.
- The program left lasting social ties, settlements, and labor networks in the region.



<https://www.lcsun-news.com/story/life/2022/03/12/bracero-program-detailed-nmsu-archive-papers/9448642002/>  
[https://media.newmexicoculture.org/media\\_files/events/1200/6514\\_1200.jpg](https://media.newmexicoculture.org/media_files/events/1200/6514_1200.jpg)



BE BOLD. Shape the Future.



The City of Las Cruces

# Consolidation, Hand Harvest & Selective Mechanization

- **After Bracero (1965–1990s)**

- **Pecans:** Doña Ana orchards continue expanding. Mechanical limb shakers and catch frames reduce some harvest picking. Orchards still require significant year-round labor.
- **Chile:** Despite research advances, field work and harvest remain largely manual through the 1980s. This sustains large seasonal crews. Early mechanization efforts were limited by fruit damage and plant architecture.
- **Regional workforce patterns:** Binational migration continues informally after 1964. Farm labor communities in Doña Ana County grow, embedding farm work into local identity, cuisine, and family economies.

# Historical Labor Landscape in Southern New Mexico

- In a 1993 survey of 109 onion harvest workers, two main migrant worker groups were identified:
  - Family groups from South Texas, long-part of the labor stream.
  - Single male workers from Mexico, forming a growing share over time.
- Strong social support networks, housing, and transport ("day-haul" systems) helped sustain labor supply.
- Annual earnings ranged from \$2,000 to \$13,000, with a median household income of \$6,000.
- A plentiful labor supply discouraged early mechanization efforts.

*Clyde Eastman, 1996, NMSU Extension Research Report 707*



**BE BOLD.** Shape the Future.



**The City of Las Cruces**

# Historical Labor Landscape in Southern New Mexico

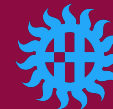
- Immigrant farm workers are usually poor before they migrate. Conditions are generally not good where they came from. Consequently, they are more willing than domestic workers to accept difficult work, lower wages, and less than optimal working conditions.
- Since the Agricultural boom of the early 1900s, thousands of migrant and seasonal workers, many from Mexico, supply critical labor for labor-intensive crops.



<https://guides.loc.gov/latinx-civil-rights/bracero-program>



BE BOLD. Shape the Future.



The City of Las Cruces

# Recent Shifts in Farm Labor & Structural Changes

- **From 2009 to 2014:**
  - Hired farmworker jobs in New Mexico increased by ~578 positions (+5%).
  - Number of farms employing hired workers rose by 28%, even as total farmworkers declined by 5%.
  - Seasonal employment fell 12%, while full-time farm work grew by 7%
- **Doña Ana County**
  - bucked national farm decline trends, seeing a 24% rise in farm numbers from 1,762 in 2007 to 2,184 in 2012 (1,990 as of 2022 Census)

*New Mexico MEP Agriculture Review: <https://web.ped.nm.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/New-Mexico-Agriculture-Report.pdf>*



**BE BOLD.** Shape the Future.



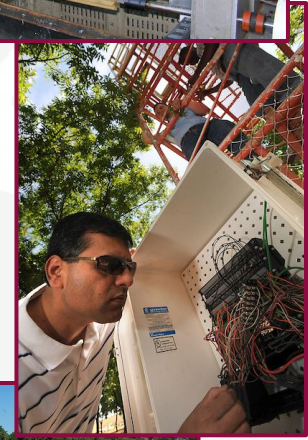
**The City of Las Cruces**

# Challenges & The Future of Farm Labor

- **Labor Scarcity**
  - Workforce shortages & aging workforce
  - Nationally, growing wealth in Mexico and stricter immigration enforcement are shrinking the traditional migrant labor pool, signaling future shortages.
  - Immigration and H-2A visa program shortfalls
  - Rising wage & compliance costs

# Mechanization & Technology

- Some agricultural sectors are exploring automation and robotics, though adoption is uneven, especially for labor-intensive crops like chile and onions.
- NMSU has many partners working in Ag Tech and Ag Experimentation Stations across the state.

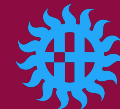


# Labor Risks, Policy, & Market Pressures

- Farm labor remains among the most hazardous job categories in the U.S., often excluded from standard labor protections.
- **2014–2015 court rulings**
  - New Mexico extended workers' compensation coverage to farmworkers, addressing a longstanding exclusion and enhancing labor protection.
- National and Global competition



BE BOLD. Shape the Future.



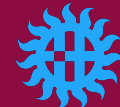
The City of Las Cruces

# Community & Cultural Dimensions

- Agricultural Labor plays an important role in sustaining farming families & traditions.
- Important to rural communities and cultural identity.



BE BOLD. Shape the Future.



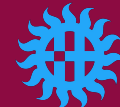
The City of Las Cruces

# Future Trends in Ag Economics & Labor

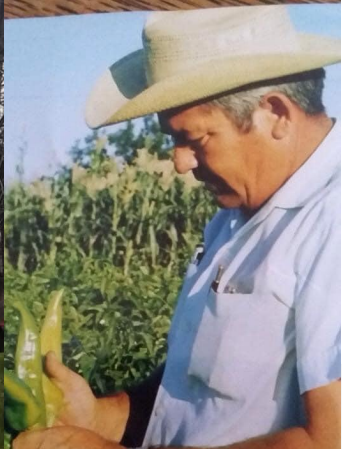
- **Southern New Mexico's Agricultural labor story reflects broader trends:**
  - Reliance on migrant farmworkers
  - Legal progress in labor rights
  - Long-term pressures from demographic change
  - Mechanization limits
  - Policy gaps
- **The region must prepare for a future defined by labor unpredictability and the need for innovation.**
  - Opportunities for innovation, education, and policy support



BE BOLD. Shape the Future.



The City of Las Cruces



# Discussion and Q & A



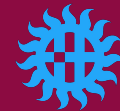
# RESOURCES AND CONTACTS

NMSU Agricultural Economics & Agricultural Business Dept.

- <https://aces.nmsu.edu/academic/aeab>



BE BOLD. Shape the Future.



The City of Las Cruces