



October 2020

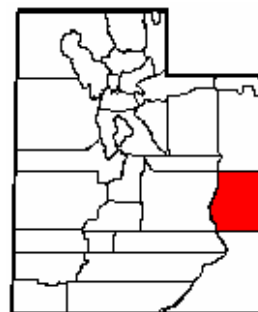
AG/Farmland/2020-15pr

Size and Scope of Grand County Agriculture 2019

Ryan Feuz, Post-Doctoral Researcher

Ryan Larsen, Assistant Professor

Michael Johnson, County Director



Location

Grand County is located in the center of the state along the eastern border with Colorado. As of 2017, the population was estimated at 9,674. Other surrounding Utah counties include Uintah, Carbon, Emery, Wayne, and San Juan.

Land Ownership

Figure 1 shows the division of land ownership within the county.

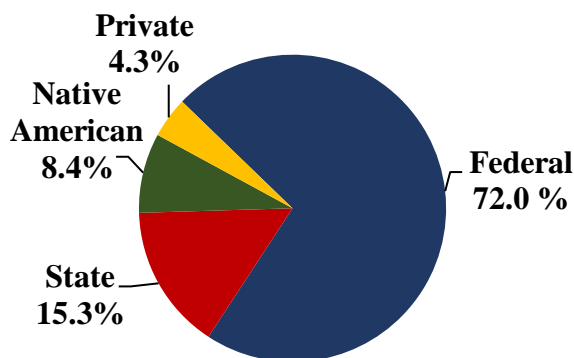


Figure 1. Grand County Land Ownership

Source: 2017 Utah Counties Fact Book

The majority of the federally owned ground is under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). The BLM manages 1,554,471 acres, or 66% of the total, and the USFS manages 57,211 acres, or 2.4% of the total. A portion of federal ground is also maintained as national parks (87,741 acres, or 3.7% of total). The state-owned ground is primarily under the jurisdiction of the Utah School and Institutional Trust Land Administration (SITLA) (The Economic Value of Public Lands in Grand County, Utah, 2015). Portions of the state-owned land are wildlife preserves and Utah state parks and recreational areas. The private ground is primarily home lots, with some farm ground and grazing areas.

The 2017 Census of Agriculture indicated that there were 231,361 acres in farms or ranches¹ in the county, with an average size of 2,268 acres and an average value of \$824 per acre. The 2017 census also reported that the county had 14,561 acres in cropland, of which 9,705 acres were harvested. A total of 11,498 acres of cropland and pastureland were irrigated.

¹ Local extension agents believe this number overestimates the actual acres of farms and ranches in the county. The value previously reported in the 2002 Census of Agriculture was 52,729. Given their

knowledge of the county, local extension agents feel that even this estimate would currently be too high.

Agricultural land prices in the county are often inflated well beyond their agricultural value. This is due to the demand for second homes or vacation properties. This is especially true within the Moab and Castle Valley areas. Agriculture within the county has diminished as tourism continues to grow.

Growing Season

The growing season in Grand County is among the longest in Utah. It averages about five-and-a-half months. Table 1 displays some of the details on climatology in two areas of Grand County according to the Utah Climate Center (2019).

Table 1. Grand County Annual Precipitation and Average Frost-Free Days				
Location	Annual precip.	Last spring freeze	First fall freeze	Freeze-free period
Castle Valley 1 NE	10.6 inches ^a	Apr. 25	Oct. 6	160 days
Moab	9.0 inches	Apr. 18	Oct. 17	183 days

^aCastle Valley annual precipitation data is from station ID# USC00421241 while the freeze data is from station ID# USC00421243.

Crop Production

Table 2 displays the major crops grown in Grand County with 2017 yields and total acres harvested.

Table 2. 2017 Grand County Crop Acres and Yields			
Primary crops	Yields	Harvested acres	Average yield/acre
Hay	31,903 tons	9,156	3.5 tons
Corn Silage	7,750 tons	350	22.1 tons

Source: 2017 USDA-NASS Census of Agriculture

Typical ground preparation for planting alfalfa begins by plowing followed by disking and then the field is cultipacked or harrowed to prepare a firm seed bed. Most of the alfalfa is seeded in the fall with a lesser portion seeded in the spring. The ground preparation procedure is the same for planting small grains. While in the past, some small grain (mostly wheat) production occurred within Grand County, currently, small grain production is minimal and typically used as a rotational crop.

The most prevalent crop rotation that producers practice is to leave alfalfa in for four to five years, small grains for one year, and then replant alfalfa. Producers typically get four cuttings of alfalfa each year.

Grand County has a number of small farms that produce vegetables, fruits, asparagus, wine grapes, and pistachios. The notable wine grape production occurs towards the south end of Spanish Valley. Organic production is growing within the small number of vegetable producers. The organic production is typically sold direct to consumers or to the local restaurant industry. There is also some growing interest in growing industrial hemp, with a few operations currently producing; one notable producer near Cisco manages 50-100 acres.

There were 102 farm operations reported in the 2017 Census of Agriculture. Most of these producers are small, especially for the specialty crops and vegetable production. The census reported 30 farm operations less than 9.9 acres. There were 14 vegetable producers reported with 165 acres of production. However, there is also a growing and fluctuating number of small backyard vegetable producers unaccounted for, with approximately no more than 10 acres of total vegetable production. There were 19 orchard operations reported with 31 acres.

There are a small number of larger farming operations, according to the 2017 Census of Agriculture (Table 3).

Table 3. Grand County Farming Operations Reported in 2017	
No. of farms	Acreage
16	50 to 179 acres
21	180 to 499 acres
6	500 to 999 acres
9	> 1,000 acres

Local extension agents report that only a small number of these larger farms actually produce significant quantities of production.

The majority of hay and corn silage are used as feed in local cattle operations. Some hay is sold for feed in neighboring counties. A lesser portion of hay is sold locally into the hobbyhorse market. However, this is not a large market within the county.

Irrigation

The majority (about 85%) of the irrigation water available in Grand County is from Ken's Lake. The other 15% comes from the Colorado River where it is either pumped directly from the river or held in small irrigation ponds. The majority of producers use wheel lines, with a minority using pivots, hand lines, or flood irrigation.

Livestock Production

The inventories of the major livestock classes produced in the county as of 2017 compared with 2012 inventories are listed in Table 4.

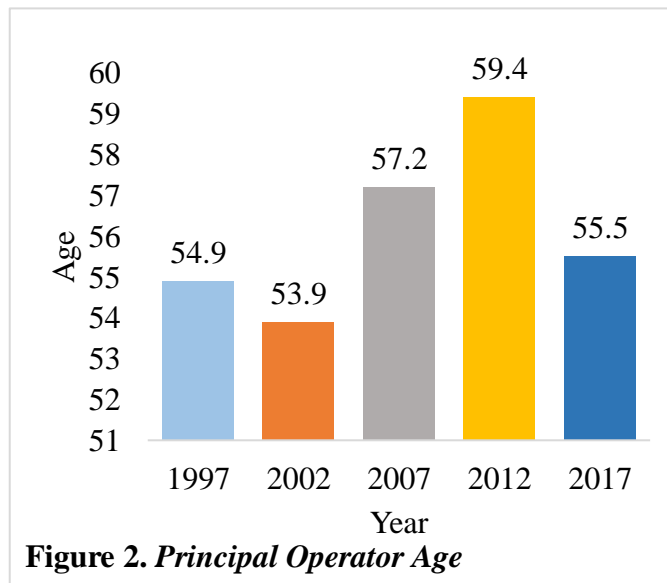
Table 4. Major Livestock Commodities			
Livestock	2012	2017	% Change
All Cattle	3,388	5,393	59.2%
Beef Cows	1,979	3,509	77.3%

Source: 2017 USDA-NASS Census of Agriculture

Although not reported in the Census of Agriculture, some sheep within the county are put on range along I-70 annually. The majority of livestock spend the summers on local pastures or on the La Sal Mountains and winters on desert rangelands. A minority remain on local pastures through the winter. Most of the cattle are sold by both video and live auctions in neighboring states (i.e., Colorado and New Mexico). Producers consider distance and market prices when selecting an auction location.

Farm Income and Age of Operator

Cash receipts from 2017 crops equaled \$4.7 million and cash receipts from livestock totaled \$2.47 million. Total 2017 cash receipts were \$7.17 million. The average age of the primary farmer or rancher was 55.5 in 2017. This is a notable decrease since the previous Census of Agriculture in 2012 when the average age was 59.4. Figure 2 below graphs the principal operator average age for all USDA-NASS Census of Agriculture years since 1997.



Source: 2017 USDA-NASS Census of Agriculture

Sources

The Economic Value of Public Lands in Grand County, Utah. (2015). Headwaters Economics. Bozeman, MT. Retrieved from http://headwaterseconomics.org/wp-content/uploads/GrandCounty_Report_March2015.pdf.

United States Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service (2019). 2017 Ag Census Data. Retrieved from https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online_Resources/Census_Data_Query_Tool/index.php.

Utah Association of Counties. (2017). 2017 Utah Counties Fact Book. Murray. Retrieved from <https://uac.memberclicks.net/assets/docs/2017-Utah-Counties-Fact-Book.pdf>.

Utah Climate Center. (2019). Utah State University. Retrieved July 10, 2019, <https://climate.usu.edu/>.

In its programs and activities, including in admissions and employment, Utah State University does not discriminate or tolerate discrimination, including harassment, based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, genetic information, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, status as a protected veteran, or any other status protected by University policy, Title IX, or any other federal, state, or local law. The following individuals have been designated to handle inquiries regarding the application of Title IX and its implementing regulations and/or USU's non-discrimination policies: Executive Director of the Office of Equity, Alison Adams-Perlac, alison.adams-perlac@usu.edu, Title IX Coordinator, Hilary Renshaw, hilary.renshaw@usu.edu, Old Main Rm. 161, 435-797-1266. For further information regarding non-discrimination, please visit equity.usu.edu, or contact: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 800-421-3481, ocr@ed.gov or U.S. Department of Education, Denver Regional Office, 303-844-5695 ocr.denver@ed.gov. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Kenneth L. White, Vice President for Extension and Agriculture, Utah State University.