

# Tablelands Agricultural Profile – 2015

## Regional description

The Tablelands agricultural region, defined by the boundaries of the Mareeba Shire Council and the Tablelands Regional Council, covers an area of 65,000km<sup>2</sup>. Most agricultural activity occurs on the elevated, eastern highlands extending from Julatten southwards to Ravenshoe, and from Kuranda westwards to Dimbulah. The regional population of 47 000 is concentrated in the major centres of Mareeba, Atherton, Kuranda, Malanda, Tolga, Yungaburra, Ravenshoe and Herberton; and the smaller centres of Chillagoe, Dimbulah, Millaa Millaa, Irvinebank, Julatten, Mt Garnet, Mt Molloy Mutchilba and Walkamin.

## Industry diversity

Tablelands agriculture includes a wide diversity of tropical and subtropical production of plant and animal industries. Forty-two large agricultural industries were identified in the Tablelands region in 2015. The success and resilience of the Tablelands agriculture sector can be attributed to this industry diversity, which provides options to farmers to change crops and farming systems to adapt to market cycles and consumer demands.

## Water supplies

Water for the Mareeba-Dimbulah Irrigation Area is supplied from Tinaroo Dam through an extensive network of channels and streams. Farms in other parts of the Tablelands (including intensive agricultural areas around Atherton, Malanda and Ravenshoe) draw water from natural watercourses, bores and farm dams.

## Soils

Soil types vary widely across the Tablelands. A typical agricultural soil in the Mareeba/Dimbulah area is derived from granite and has inherent low fertility. Soil profiles for these soils often comprise a sandy loam/sandy clay loam over a red or yellow, structured, coarse sandy clay soil with a slightly acid pH. Soils in the Atherton area are often derived from basalt, are well drained and have

high fertility. Soil profiles for these soils usually comprise a red, structured, high clay soil with an acid-neutral pH.

## Climate

There is wide variation in climate across the Tablelands region, influenced by changes in altitude and the proximity of the Great Dividing Range. Elevated eastern and southern areas are generally wetter and cooler, whereas western and northern areas are hotter and drier. Winds from tropical cyclones are often of lower speed and are less damaging on the Tablelands than in adjacent coastal regions.

*Table 1 – Climate of key Tablelands towns*

Locality	Altitude (m)	Annual rainfall (mm)	Average temp. range (°C)	
			Jan.	July
Kuranda	336	2002	24-31	17-26
Mareeba	400	918	21-31	11-25
Dimbulah	407	783	22-34	11-27
Atherton	752	1420	18-29	10-22
Malanda	738	1565	17-28	5-22
Ravenshoe	930	842	16-31	3-23

## Gross value of production\*

Tablelands agricultural industries realised a gross value of production of over \$552 million in 2015. This represents an increase in the farm gate value of the Tablelands agricultural sector by over 30%, when compared with estimates from 2010/11. This increase is largely due to the major expansion of avocado, banana, blueberry, citrus and sugar cane plantings within the region and good market prices for a number of key industries over recent years.

**Table 2 – Gross Value of Production\* of  
Tablelands Agriculture, 2015**

Agricultural activity	Area (ha)	No. of Farms	Volume sold	Unit	Gross Revenue (\$)
Aquaculture	30	18	259	tonnes	\$3,026,898
Avocado	950	80	13,011	tonnes	\$82,901,505
Banana	1,850	37	50,500	tonnes	\$90,989,270
Basil	45	11	19,200	bunch	\$1,036,800
Beef cattle	550,000	521	30,330	head	\$34,740,000
Blueberry	48	<5	283	tonnes	\$11,320,000
Cashews	240	<5	100	tonnes	\$190,000
Citrus	480	180	7,840	tonnes	\$31,356,720
Coffee	369	10	375	tonnes	\$3,187,500
Custard apple	30	9	330	tonnes	\$1,650,000
Dairy cattle	8,800	50	58,000,000	litres	\$34,360,000
Flowers	36	23	4,260,000	stems	\$3,408,000
Forestry plantation	3,600	10	54,500	m3	\$3,332,000
Grass seed	1,195	35	429	tonnes	\$4,778,000
Hay	3,020	55	17,400	tonnes	\$3,747,000
Honey	0	124	112.5	tonnes	\$393,750
Legume seed	968	20	1,937	tonnes	\$3,015,000
Longan	125	15	1,125	tonnes	\$6,750,000
Lychee	250	40	1,250	tonnes	\$12,750,000
Macadamia	47.9	<5	120	tonnes	\$538,875
Maize	4,719	45	35,393	tonnes	\$11,325,600
Mango	2,400	180	23,396	tonnes	\$50,678,160
Melons	42	10	748	tonnes	\$1,203,128
Mixed fruit	24	20	317	tonnes	\$1,492,000
Mixed vegetable	51	41	1,485	tonnes	\$2,998,200
Nursery production	100	20	na	na	\$6,000,000
Papaya	285	15	7,875	tonnes	\$15,159,375
Passionfruit	40	20	600	tonnes	\$2,145,000
Peanut	874	26	4,725	tonnes	\$4,810,050
Pineapple	150	<5	2,000	tonnes	\$2,400,000
Pork	20	6	19,612	Head	\$4,695,000
Potatoes	972	28	34,992	tonnes	\$15,746,400
Poultry (eggs)	12	<5	1,574,701	cartons	\$4,902,978
Poultry (meat)	40	10	9,100,000	birds	\$30,030,000
Pumpkin	270	31	9,300	tonnes	\$8,850,000
Sugar cane	10,956	85	1,064,714	tonnes	\$39,067,030
Strawberry	1	<5	36	tonnes	\$396,000
Sweet potato	123	14	6,946	tonnes	\$5,556,800
Table grape	87	7	522	tonnes	\$3,132,000
Tea	445	<5	6,000	tonnes	\$6,000,000
Tea tree	150	17	55	tonnes	\$1,800,000
Turf	20	<5	8,325	meters2	\$406,500
<b>Totals</b>	<b>593,935</b>	<b>1830</b>			<b>\$552,265,539</b>

## Fruit and nut crops

The banana industry, worth \$91.0 million, remains the most valuable agricultural industry on the Tablelands. Significant new areas have been planted since cyclones damaged adjacent coastal areas in 2006 and 2011. Tableland production volumes have subsequently increased, however banana prices in 2015 were low. The avocado industry, valued at \$83 million is the Tablelands fastest growing agricultural industry. Large areas of new plantings, good

market prices and recovery from past cyclone damage have seen the value of this industry, more than double since 2011. The citrus industry (primarily limes and lemons), valued at \$31 million, has also grown rapidly. Many young orchards have reached maturity, new plantings are continuing and 2015 prices were good. The mango industry (\$52 million) is slowly evolving with new varieties replacing older ones. Mango volumes were at near-record levels in 2014/15, however market prices were low.

The papaya industry (\$15 million) remained relatively stable in 2015, whereas the lychee industry (\$13 million) had a very good year with consistent volumes and increased market prices. Blueberries (\$11 million) are a new industry to the Tablelands and are expected to continue growing rapidly. Other fruit and nut industries include longan (\$6.8 million), table grapes (\$3.1 million), pineapple (\$2.4 million), passionfruit (\$2.1 million), custard apples (\$1.7 million), macadamias (\$0.5 million), strawberries (\$0.4 million) and cashews (\$0.2 million). Mixed fruits including carambola, jackfruit, dragonfruit, stone fruit, and persimmons were collectively valued at \$1.5 million.

## Cropping and vegetables

The sugar cane industry (\$39 million) is the Tablelands largest cropping industry, and has expanded significantly since 2011 to meet the demands of the Tableland and Mossman sugar mills. The maize industry (\$11.3 million), which was impacted by cyclone in 2011, has also increased in value, with more areas planted and improved prices. Other cropping industries include peanut (\$4.8 million), grass seed (\$4.8 million), hay (\$3.7 million) and legume seed (\$3.0 million).

The potato industry (\$15.8 million) remains the largest Tableland vegetable industry, despite continued declines each year. The pumpkin (\$8.9 million) and sweet potato industries (\$5.6 million) have expanded in area and both returned good market prices in 2015. Other important industries include: tea (\$6.0 million), coffee (\$3.2 million), mixed vegetables and hydroponics (\$3.0 million), tea tree (\$1.8 million), melons (\$1.2 million) and basil (\$1.0 million).

## Lifestyle horticulture and forestry

The lifestyle horticulture sector is influenced by economic factors including consumer confidence and spending. Production nurseries (\$6.0 million)

are the largest lifestyle horticulture industry, however their value has declined since 2011, due to reduced demands for forestry and landscape plants. The turf industry (\$0.4 million) has also decreased. The value of the cut flower and foliage industry remained relatively stable at \$3.4 million. Forestry plantations (Caribbean & hoop pine) are valued at \$3.3million and supply sawmills at Ravenshoe and Mareeba.

## Animal industries

Beef cattle (\$35 million), is the most widespread industry on the Tablelands and the primary land use in the central and western areas. The volume of beef cattle sales has reduced in recent years due to impacts of drought, however prices have increased greatly. The dairy industry (\$34.4 million) has now stabilised after a prolonged period of decline. Tableland milk prices have also increased slightly.

The poultry meat industry supplies the Mareeba processing factory and has remained stable at \$30.0 million (data corrected since 2011). The aquaculture industry, including barramundi, crayfish and crocodiles, has halved since 2011 and is now valued at \$3 million. Other intensive

livestock industries include poultry eggs (\$4.9 million) and pork (\$4.7 million). The honey industry with over 100 registered beekeepers is valued at \$0.4 million, and also provides essential pollination services for many Tablelands crop industries.

## For more information

Contact:

Department of Agriculture and Fisheries

28 Peters Street, Mareeba, Qld.

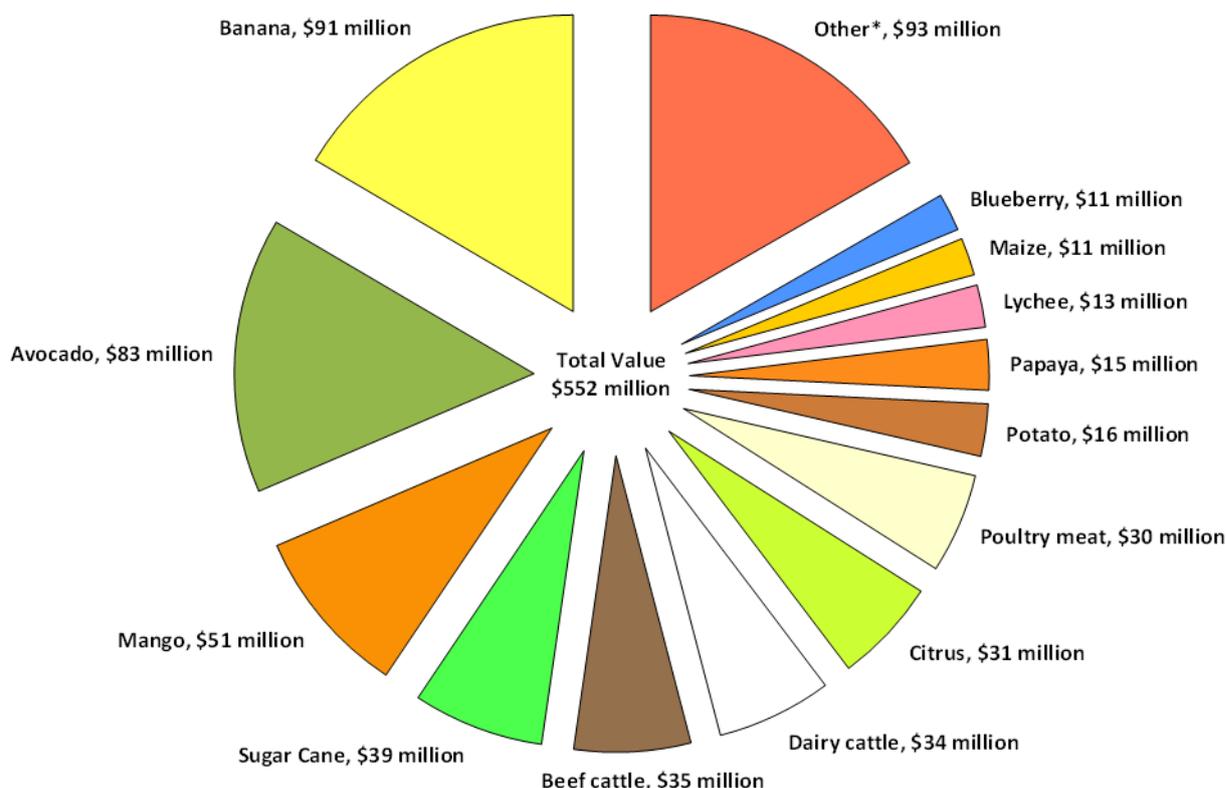
Phone: (07) 4048 4600

Visit [www.daff.qld.gov.au](http://www.daff.qld.gov.au) or call 13 25 23.

**Data sources:** Industry figures were calculated using data from multiple industry, government and grower sources and should be recognised as best estimates only.

**\*Gross Value of Production:** Value of production at wholesale prices realised in the marketplace (does not include value-added products).

Gross Value of Production for Tablelands Agricultural Industries - 2015.



\*Other = Combined value of 29 remaining smaller industries.