

News Release

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June 25, 2026

Cochise County's Solo Businesses: Recent Growth and Long-Term Trends

BENSON — According to recently released U.S. Census Bureau data, from 2018 to 2023 the number of nonemployer businesses in Cochise County grew from 6,885 to 7,659. That's an increase of 774 businesses, or about 11%.

During the same period, total sales rose from \$221.8 million to \$300.7 million, a gain of \$78.9 million, or 36%. However, these sales figures are not adjusted for inflation. Over those years, the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U) increased by about 21%, meaning that a significant portion of the sales growth reflects higher prices rather than just more business activity. After adjusting for inflation, real sales growth from 2018 to 2023 is closer to 12%.

Looking further back, in 2002 there were 5,506 nonemployer businesses in the county. Over 21 years, Cochise County added 2,153 businesses, a 39% increase. Sales nearly doubled, rising from \$154.6 million in 2002 to \$300.7 million in 2023, an increase of \$146.1 million, or 95%. But with the CPI-U rising about 70% over that period, the real (inflation-adjusted) growth in sales is closer to 15%.

Industry trends show that construction, real estate, professional services, and transportation have been key drivers of nonemployer business growth. Construction businesses grew from 744 in 2018 to 823 in 2023 (up 79 businesses, or 11%), and their sales rose from \$28.2 million to \$44.4 million (up \$16.2 million, or 57%). Transportation and warehousing saw even faster growth, with establishments rising from 394 to 712 (up 318, or 81%) and sales jumping from \$18.6 million to \$31.3 million (up \$12.7 million, or 68%).

Professional, scientific, and technical services also expanded, with the number of businesses increasing from 674 to 779 (up 105, or 16%) and sales rising from \$25.3 million to \$31.6 million (up \$6.3 million, or 25%). Real estate and rental and leasing grew from 602

to 605 businesses (up 3, or 0.5%) but saw sales rise from \$36.2 million to \$41.4 million (up \$5.2 million, or 14%).

Other sectors also contributed to the county's nonemployer business landscape. Retail trade, for example, had 732 businesses in 2018 and 683 in 2023, a decrease of 49 businesses (down 7%), but sales still increased from \$23.8 million to \$30.6 million (up \$6.8 million, or 29%). Administrative and support and waste management services grew from 896 to 964 businesses (up 68, or 8%) and saw sales rise from \$13.0 million to \$20.0 million (up \$7.0 million, or 54%).

The overall picture is one of steady expansion, but with important context. While the number of nonemployer businesses and their total sales have grown, much of the sales increase is explained by inflation. The real gains, after accounting for rising prices, are more modest—about 12% in the most recent five-year period and 15% since 2002. Growth has been especially strong in sectors like construction and transportation, while others, such as retail, have seen mixed results in business counts but still posted sales gains.

Cochise County's entrepreneurial spirit remains strong, and the local economy continues to benefit from a diverse and growing base of self-run businesses. However, the latest data show that inflation and economic uncertainty are making it harder for these businesses to get ahead. As the county looks to the future, supporting solo entrepreneurs will be key to keeping the local economy vibrant and resilient.

For more information on the Cochise County economy, including current and historical data, visit CochiseEconomy.com, a partnership project of Southeast Arizona Economic Development Group, Arizona G&T Cooperatives, and community sponsors.

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