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# Agricultural Labor Employment and Wages

August 2011

## Executive Summary

Statewide total agricultural employment increased 8.5 percent between August 2010 and August 2011. Monthly, over the period of July 2011 through August 2011, statewide total agricultural employment increased 23.5 percent.

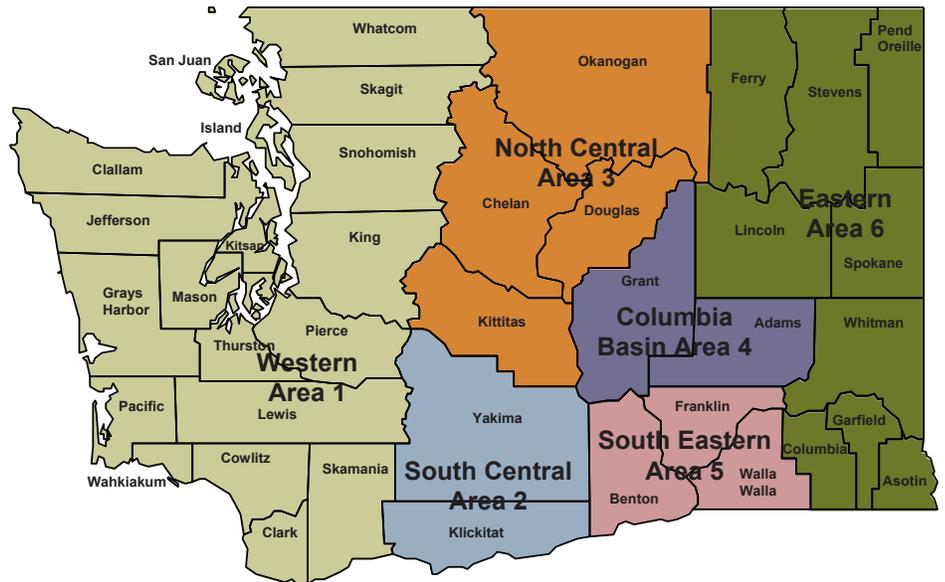
Total agricultural employment increased over the year in four of the six agricultural areas.

- South Central (Area 2) experienced the largest total agricultural employment increase (3,340).
- Western (Area 1) experienced the largest total agricultural employment decrease (-930).

### Counties Within Agricultural Reporting Areas

- Area 1 = Clallam, Clark, Cowlitz, Grays Harbor, Island, Jefferson, King, Kitsap, Lewis, Mason, Pacific, Pierce, San Juan, Skagit, Skamania, Snohomish, Thurston, Wahkiakum and Whatcom
- Area 2 = Klickitat and Yakima
- Area 3 = Chelan, Douglas, Kittitas and Okanogan
- Area 4 = Adams and Grant
- Area 5 = Benton, Franklin and Walla Walla
- Area 6 = Asotin, Columbia, Ferry, Garfield, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Spokane, Stevens and Whitman

### Agricultural Reporting Areas in Washington State



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**Washington State  
Employment Security Department**

Labor Market and Economic Analysis  
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For additional information, call the  
Labor Market Information Center:  
800-215-1617

or visit our website,  
[www.workforceexplorer.com](http://www.workforceexplorer.com).



*Statewide total agricultural employment increased 12.4 percent between August 2010 and August 2011.*



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## Total Agricultural Employment Summary

Statewide total agricultural employment increased 8.5 percent over the period of August 2010 through August 2011. Total employment decreased 23.5 percent over the period of July 2011 through August 2011.

Over the year regionally, Western (Area 1) total employment decreased 6.2 percent. South Central (Area 2) total employment

increased 11.8 percent. North Central (Area 3) total employment increased 11.2 percent. Columbia Basin (Area 4) total employment increased 14.7 percent. South Eastern (Area 5) total employment increased 9 percent. Eastern (Area 6) total employment decreased 0.5 percent.

## Seasonal Agricultural Employment Summary

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment increased by 17.9 percent over the period of August 2010 through August 2011.

Over-the-year employment increases in agricultural activities were:

- cherry work (9,830),
- apple work (3,460),
- potato work (920),
- raspberry work (700),
- hops work (440),
- grapes work (50) and
- wheat/grain work (40).

Activities with decreases were:

- pear work (-2,160),
- miscellaneous vegetables work (-1,630),
- other tree fruit work (-480),
- nursery work (-470),
- onion work (-350) and
- other seasonal work (-60).

Across the state, Western (Area 1) seasonal employment decreased 12 percent due to decreased miscellaneous vegetables work (-680). South Central (Area 2) seasonal

employment increased 33 percent due to increased apple work (5,720). North Central (Area 3) seasonal employment increased 19.2 percent due to increased apple work (3,950). Columbia Basin (Area 4) seasonal employment increased 26.6 percent due to increased cherry work (1,740). South Eastern (Area 5) seasonal employment increased 13.8 percent due to increased apple work (1,090). Eastern (Area 6) seasonal employment decreased 14.9 percent due to decreased other seasonal work (-180).



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## Statewide and Regional Wage Trends

Statewide, inflation-adjusted agricultural seasonal employee wages decreased 0.6 percent over the two-year period of August 2009 through August 2011. Washington state inflation-adjusted minimum wages increased 0.5 percent during the same period. Statewide inflation-adjusted agricultural seasonal employee wages decreased 4.5 percent over the one-year period of August 2010 through August 2011. The inflation-adjusted state minimum wage increased 0.1 percent during the same period.

Western (Area 1) inflation-adjusted seasonal wages decreased 7.1 percent over the period of August 2010 through

August 2011. South Central (Area 2) seasonal wages decreased 8.1 percent. North Central (Area 3) seasonal wages decreased 0.6 percent. Columbia Basin (Area 4) seasonal wages decreased 2.2 percent. South Eastern (Area 5) seasonal wages decreased 5.9 percent. Eastern (Area 6) seasonal wages increased 3.2 percent.

Statewide, current dollar agricultural seasonal employee wages increased 1.3 percent over the two-year period of August 2009 through August 2011. Washington state current dollar minimum wages increased 1.4 percent during the same one-year period. Statewide current dollar

agricultural seasonal employee wages decreased 3.3 percent over the one-year period of August 2010 through August 2011. The state minimum wage decreased 3.1 percent during the same period.

Western (Area 1) seasonal wages decreased 5.9 percent over the period of August 2010 through August 2011. South Central (Area 2) seasonal wages decreased 7 percent. North Central (Area 3) seasonal wages increased 0.7 percent. Columbia Basin (Area 4) seasonal wages decreased 0.9 percent. South Eastern (Area 5) seasonal wages decreased 4.7 percent. Eastern (Area 6) increased 4.5 percent.

## Statewide and Regional Employment Trends

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment increased 11.5 percent over the two-year period of August 2009 through August 2011. Statewide seasonal agricultural employment increased 17.9 percent over the one-year period of August 2010 through August

2011. Western (Area 1) seasonal employment decreased 12.1 percent during the same period. South Central (Area 2) seasonal employment increased 33 percent. North Central (Area 3) seasonal employment increased 19.3 percent. Columbia Basin

(Area 4) seasonal employment increased 26.5 percent. South Eastern (Area 5) seasonal employment increased 13.8 percent. Eastern (Area 6) seasonal employment decreased 14 percent.

## Labor Supply

The weighted percent of labor employment reported was 4.8 percent. For August 2011, 870 usable surveys were returned. The first question on the labor supply survey asks agricultural operators if they failed to complete some work due to lack of available seasonal labor. The second question asks operators how many more employees they could have used.

There is no agreed upon concept of a labor “shortage.” In general, in a highly competitive labor market, like the agricultural labor market, if an agricultural producer experiences a shortage of labor, that producer is likely offering a wage rate that is less than the current market rate. Other factors can result in a spot shortage as well, such as an unanticipated

change in weather patterns. For a more complete discussion see “A Statement of the Employment/Shortage Debate,” *2009 Agricultural Workforce in Washington State*, Ch. 2 p. 15 and “Media Reported Reasons for Spot Shortages,” *2007 Agricultural Workforce in Washington State*, Ch. 3 pp 30-31.

[Learn about our survey methodology.](#)

# Agricultural Labor Report

## Employment Security Department, Labor Market and Economic Analysis

### Seasonal Labor Abstract

#### August 2011

Each month, the Employment Security Department conducts a mid-month survey of farm labor employment and wages. At least 15 percent of all agricultural operators are surveyed for employment data about seasonal workers, type of crop, work activity and wages. Based on these data, estimates are developed on the size of the workforce and average wages for each activity. These data are reported for each agricultural area identified as having similar farm labor characteristics and a significant supply/demand for seasonal hired workforce.

#### **Western (Area 1) (Clallam, Clark, Cowlitz, Grays Harbor, Island, Jefferson, King, Kitsap, Lewis, Mason, Pacific, Pierce, San Juan, Skagit, Skamania, Snohomish, Thurston, Wahkiakum and Whatcom counties)**

Estimated seasonal workforce: 6,760

Raspberry Harvester .....	1,270	\$ 8.73/hr
Strawberry Worker .....	**	**
Blueberry Harvester .....	**	**
Raspberry Sorter/Grader/Packer .....	490	\$ 8.84/hr

#### **South Central (Area 2) (Klickitat and Yakima counties)**

Estimated seasonal workforce: 19,680

Apple Hand Thinner .....	9,290	\$ 8.79/hr
Cherry Harvester .....	1,890	\$ 9.50/hr
Cherry Sorter/Grader/Packer .....	1,590	\$ 9.38/hr
Pear Harvester .....	1,280	\$12.07/hr or \$14.00 - \$18.00 per bin

#### **North Central (Area 3) (Chelan, Douglas, Kittitas and Okanogan counties)**

Estimated seasonal workforce: 18,120

Cherry Harvester .....	10,690	\$ 8.80/hr or \$ 3.00 - \$ 6.50 per lug
Apple Hand Thinner .....	2,050	\$ 9.42/hr
Cherry Sorter/Grader/Packer .....	1,850	\$ 8.75/hr
Apple Harvester .....	760	\$ 8.75/hr

#### **Columbia Basin (Area 4) (Adams and Grant counties)**

Estimated seasonal workforce: 9,360

Apple Hand Thinner .....	3,720	\$ 8.80/hr or \$ 0.21 - \$ 1.50 per tree
Cherry Harvester .....	1,690	Not Reported
Apple Worker .....	590	\$10.61/hr
Field Corn Worker .....	**	**

#### **South Eastern (Area 5) (Benton, Franklin and Walla Walla counties)**

Estimated seasonal workforce: 10,890

Apple Harvester .....	2,420	Not Reported
Apple Hand Thinner .....	1,900	\$ 8.90/hr
Blueberry Harvester .....	1,190	Not Reported
Apple Pruner .....	1,040	\$ 8.71hr

#### **Eastern (Area 6) (Asotin, Columbia, Ferry, Garfield, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Spokane, Stevens and Whitman counties)**

Estimated seasonal workforce: 980

Wheat Vehicle Operator .....	340	\$11.07/hr
Wheat Harvester .....	280	\$13.09/hr
Wheat Combine Driver .....	90	\$13.80/hr or \$125 - \$185 per day
Wheat Worker .....	90	\$ 9.96/hr

\*\* Not published due to lack of statistical significance or to ensure employers' confidentiality.

## August 2011

### Agricultural Farm Labor Report, Washington State

Agricultural Reporting Area	Seasonal Total	Seasonal Percent of Total	Permanent Total	Permanent Percent of Total	Total	Percent of Total
Western	6,760	10.3%	7,260	18.9%	14,020	13.5%
South Central	19,680	29.9%	12,070	31.5%	31,750	30.5%
North Central	18,120	27.5%	7,090	18.5%	25,210	24.2%
Columbia Basin	9,360	14.2%	4,080	10.6%	13,440	12.9%
South Eastern	10,890	16.6%	6,830	17.8%	17,720	17.0%
Eastern	980	1.5%	1,030	2.7%	2,010	1.9%
Statewide	65,790	100.0%	38,360	100.0%	104,150	100.0%

### Total Agricultural Employment

Agricultural Reporting Area	August '11 Preliminary	July '11 Revised	August '10 Revised	Change		Percent Change	
				July '11 - August '11	August '10 - August '11	July '11 - August '11	August '10 - August '11
Statewide	104,150	136,070	96,010	-31,920	8,130	-23.5%	8.5%
Western	14,020	15,330	14,940	-1,310	-930	-8.5%	-6.2%
South Central	31,750	48,210	28,410	-16,470	3,340	-34.2%	11.8%
North Central	25,210	35,750	22,670	-10,540	2,540	-29.5%	11.2%
Columbia Basin	13,440	13,920	11,710	-480	1,720	-3.4%	14.7%
South Eastern	17,720	21,310	16,250	-3,590	1,470	-16.8%	9.0%
Eastern	2,010	1,550	2,030	470	-10	30.3%	-0.5%

### Seasonal Agricultural Employment

Agricultural Reporting Area	August '11 Preliminary	July '11 Revised	August '10 Revised	Change		Percent Change	
				July '11 - August '11	August '10 - August '11	July '11 - August '11	August '10 - August '11
Statewide	65,790	91,490	55,790	-25,690	10,000	-28.1%	17.9%
Western	6,760	7,720	7,690	-950	-920	-12.3%	-12.0%
South Central	19,680	35,340	14,800	-15,650	4,880	-44.3%	33.0%
North Central	18,120	25,790	15,190	-7,680	2,920	-29.8%	19.2%
Columbia Basin	9,360	9,110	7,400	250	1,970	2.7%	26.6%
South Eastern	10,890	13,100	9,570	-2,210	1,320	-16.9%	13.8%
Eastern	980	430	1,140	550	-170	127.9%	-14.9%

Due to increased sample size, over-the-month and over-the-year changes may not be comparable.

For more data and a sample of the Agricultural Labor Report survey, go to the  
[August 2011 Agricultural Labor Employment and Wages Tables.](#)

[2011 Year-to-Date Employment Tables](#)  
are available at [www.workforceexplorer.com](http://www.workforceexplorer.com).

# Agricultural Labor Report

## Factors Affecting the Farm Labor Supply and Demand Situation

### Crop, Market and Weather Conditions by Area

#### Washington State, August 2011



### Western (Area 1)

Weather conditions were cooler and wetter than normal during the reporting period. Raspberry growers continued post-harvest pruning operations. Blueberry harvest continued. Primary agricultural activities were raspberry harvest, strawberry miscellaneous work, blueberry harvest and raspberry warehouse work.

### South Central (Area 2)

Weather conditions were cooler and wetter than normal during the reporting period. Vegetable harvest hit its peak. This included corn, melons, peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers and squash. Harvest of plums, peaches and nectarines continued. Hop harvest also started. Pear harvest started as well as the harvest of early apple varieties including Gala. The Washington apple industry is forecasting the third-largest crop in history at 106.3 million, 40-pound boxes. That's down 2.7 percent from last year's record 109.2 million-box crop. Washington produces about 65 percent of the nation's fresh apples and about 50 percent of its processing apples used for sauce, juice and baking.

### North Central (Area 3)

Weather conditions were cooler and wetter than normal during the reporting period. Winter wheat harvest was about 50 percent complete. Cherry harvest was still under way, but winding down. The cherry harvest is expected to be the second largest on record. The season will finish in September at about 18 million boxes. The record was 20.4 million boxes in 2009. Prices for all varieties of cherries were at \$43.77 per box, compared with \$40.92 per box a year ago and \$23.36 per box two years ago during the record crop.

### Columbia Basin (Area 4)

Weather conditions were cooler and wetter than normal during the reporting period. Wheat harvest was complete and winter wheat seeding was progressing. The wheat harvest yields were above average. Washington wheat farmers are reporting yields 5 to 10 percent above last year's crop. The cooler spring weather delayed harvest by 10 to 13 days in Eastern Washington. Prices for hard red winter wheat and dark Northern spring wheat are about \$1.50 more per bushel than last year.

### South Eastern (Area 5)

Weather conditions were cooler and wetter than normal during the reporting period. Sweet corn was progressing. Potatoes and onions continued to be harvested. Reported wheat yields were higher than normal. Primary agricultural activities were apple harvest, apple thinning, blueberry harvest and apple pruning.

### Eastern (Area 6)

Weather conditions were drier and wetter than normal during the reporting period. Wheat harvest was winding down. The second cutting of hay was being completed in most areas. Peas, lentil and garbanzo harvest was just getting started.