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Agricultural Labor Employment and Wages

November 2011

Executive summary

Statewide total agricultural employment increased 10.9 percent from November 2010 to November 2011. Monthly, over the period of October 2011 through November 2011, statewide total agricultural employment decreased 32.8 percent.

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

- South Central (Area 2) experienced the largest total agricultural employment increase (4,340).
- Western (Area 1) experienced the largest total agricultural employment decrease (-370).

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.esd.wa.gov/employmentdata



Statewide total agricultural employment increased 10.9 percent from November 2010 to November 2011.



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Total agricultural employment

Statewide total agricultural employment increased 10.9 percent over the period of November 2010 through November 2011. Total employment decreased 32.8 percent over the period of October 2011 through November 2011.

Regional employment change over the year:

- Western (Area 1) total employment decreased 4 percent.

- South Central (Area 2) total employment increased 22 percent.
- North Central (Area 3) total employment increased 9.8 percent.
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) total employment increased 10.2 percent.
- South Eastern (Area 5) total employment increased 7.4 percent.
- Eastern (Area 6) total employment increased 1.5 percent.

Seasonal agricultural employment

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment increased by 30.6 percent over the period of November 2010 through November 2011.

Agricultural activities with seasonal employment increases over the year:

- Apple work (6,690)
- Miscellaneous vegetable work (380)
- Other seasonal work (310)
- Potato work (270)
- Hop work (230)
- Cherry work (140)
- Wheat/grain work (70)
- Onion work (60)

Agricultural activities with seasonal employment decreases over the year:

- Grape work (-180)
- Nursery work (-170)
- Raspberry work (-100)

Regional seasonal employment change over the year:

- Western (Area 1) increased 10.1 percent due to increased other seasonal work (110).
- South Central (Area 2) increased 54.2 percent due to increased apple work (3,290).
- North Central (Area 3) increased 63.1 percent due to increased apple work (2,220).
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) increased 21.9 percent due to increased apple work (1,119).
- South Eastern (Area 5) decreased 0.9 percent due to decreased onion work (-430).
- Eastern (Area 6) increased 137.5 percent due to increased other seasonal work (40) and wheat/grain work (40).

Statewide and regional wage trends

Inflation-adjusted wages

Statewide, inflation-adjusted agricultural seasonal employee wages increased 2.6 percent over the two-year period of November 2009 through November 2011. Washington state inflation-adjusted minimum wages increased 0.5 percent during the same time period. Statewide inflation-adjusted agricultural seasonal employee wages were unchanged over the one-year period of November 2010 through November 2011. The inflation-adjusted state minimum wage increased 0.1 percent during the same time period.

Regional wage changes over the year in inflation-adjusted dollars:

- Western (Area 1) inflation-adjusted seasonal wages decreased 1.3 percent.

- South Central (Area 2) seasonal wages decreased 2.3 percent.
- North Central (Area 3) seasonal wages decreased 1.6 percent.
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) seasonal wages increased 6.0 percent.
- South Eastern (Area 5) seasonal wages increased 2.9 percent.

Current dollar wages

Statewide, current dollar agricultural seasonal employee wages increased 4.6 percent over the two-year period of November 2009 through November 2011. Washington state current dollar minimum wages increased 1.4 percent during this same two-year

period. Statewide current dollar agricultural seasonal employee wages increased 1.3 percent over the period of November 2010 through November 2011.

Regional wage changes over the year in current dollars:

- Western (Area 1) seasonal wages decreased 0.1 percent.
- South Central (Area 2) seasonal wages decreased 1.1 percent.
- North Central (Area 3) seasonal wages decreased 0.3 percent.
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) seasonal wages increased 7.3 percent.
- South Eastern (Area 5) seasonal wages increased 4.2 percent.

Statewide and regional employment trends

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment increased 73.3 percent over the two-year period of November 2009 through November 2011. Statewide seasonal agricultural employment increased 30.5 percent over the one-year period of November 2010 through November 2011.

Regional seasonal employment change over the year by agricultural area:

- Western (Area 1) seasonal employment increased 10.1 percent.
- South Central (Area 2) seasonal employment increased 54.2 percent.
- North Central (Area 3) seasonal employment increased 63.1 percent.
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) seasonal employment increased 21.9 percent.
- South Eastern (Area 5) seasonal employment decreased 0.9 percent.
- Eastern (Area 6) seasonal employment increased 137.5 percent.

Agricultural labor supply

The weighted percent of labor shortage reported was 1 percent. For November 2011, 994 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.

Methodology

Data in this report are from the monthly Seasonal Farm Labor Survey. This is a survey of 2,000 agricultural operators in the state. Agricultural operators report monthly the number of total and seasonal workers by crop, activity and wage. Hourly and piece rates are used. Seasonal workers for the purpose of the survey are those working less than 150 days per year.

The state is grouped into six areas based on agricultural economic similarity. The tables and charts presented in this report compare the seasonal agricultural employment for the state and the six areas for the cur-

There is no agreed upon concept of a labor “shortage.” In general, in a highly competitive labor market such as 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

rent month, previous month and previous year. Percentage increases as well as raw numbers are given. The weighted monthly wage for seasonal employment is given for the state and the six areas. Each crop activity having significant employment is noted as a percentage change for previous month and previous year. Crops having the greatest increase and greatest decrease in employment are highlighted in the narrative. The Seasonal Labor Abstract contains the top four crop activities by employment and wage for each of the six areas. Piece rates are given in addition to hourly wages when available and disclosable.

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.

Some variation in reporting of seasonal data can be attributed to the requirement that employment be reported in the pay period including the 12th of the month. Due to fact that the timing of a given crop’s harvest and other activities can be affected by weather and other conditions, periods of peak employment do not always fit precisely within the reporting period. This reporting condition can lead to some variation of estimated employment by crop when comparing activity in similar time periods.

This report is intended for economists, growers’ associations, educators, state agencies, labor unions, outreach workers and the public.

Washington agriculture links

Washington crop harvest and weather information:

www.nass.usda.gov/wa

What’s new in agricultural employment:

www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usdahome

Agricultural labor report

Employment Security Department, Labor Market and Economic Analysis

Seasonal labor abstract

November 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: 2,070

Raspberry Pruner	340	\$ 8.70/hr
Potato Sorter/Grader/Packer	310	\$ 9.38/hr
Blueberry Worker	300	\$ 8.68/hr
Nursery & Tree Harvester	170	\$10.05/hr

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 10,730

Apple Worker	4,150	\$10.58/hr
Apple Harvester	3,480	\$10.38/hr or \$18.00 - \$33.00 per bin
Apple Sorter/Grader/Packer	630	\$ 9.45/hr
Carrot Harvester	**	**

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 7,600

Apple Harvester	4,700	\$10.21/hr or \$15.00 - \$25.00 per bin
Apple Worker	710	\$ 8.71/hr
Apple Sorter/Grader/Packer	690	\$ 8.67/hr
Nursery & Tree Worker	480	\$ 8.67/hr

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 6,060

Apple Harvester	4,380	\$10.90/hr or \$14.00 - \$30.00 per bin
Apple Worker	280	\$ 9.08/hr
Misc Onion Worker	260	\$ 8.74/hr
Misc Onion Sorter/Grader/Packer	190	\$ 8.67/hr

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 7,670

Apple Harvester	5,610	\$ 8.90/hr or \$18.00 - \$30.00 per bin
Carrot Sorter/Grader/Packer	**	**
Grapes Harvester	310	\$ 9.55/hr
Potato Sorter/Grader/Packer	300	\$ 8.85/hr

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 190

Apple Worker	70	\$ 9.00/hr
Wheat Worker	50	\$12.96/hr
Nursery & Tree Worker	30	\$11.83/hr
Beef Cattle Worker	20	\$10.00/hr

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

November 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	2,070	6.0%	6,800	17.3%	8,870	12.0%
South Central	10,730	31.3%	13,340	33.9%	24,070	32.7%
North Central	7,600	22.1%	7,150	18.1%	14,750	20.0%
Columbia Basin	6,060	17.7%	3,700	9.4%	9,760	13.2%
South Eastern	7,670	22.3%	7,230	18.4%	14,900	20.2%
Eastern	190	0.6%	1,180	3.0%	1,370	1.9%
Statewide	34,320	100.0%	39,400	100.0%	73,720	100.0%

Total agricultural employment

Agricultural reporting area	November '11 preliminary	October '11 revised	November '10 revised	Change		Percent change	
				October '11 - November '11	November '10 - November '11	October '11 - November '11	November '10 - November '11
Statewide	73,720	109,650	66,470	-35,930	7,240	-32.8%	10.9%
Western	8,870	10,470	9,240	-1,600	-370	-15.3%	-4.0%
South Central	24,070	39,780	19,730	-15,710	4,340	-39.5%	22.0%
North Central	14,750	24,010	13,430	-9,260	1,320	-38.6%	9.8%
Columbia Basin	9,760	15,670	8,860	-5,910	900	-37.7%	10.2%
South Eastern	14,900	17,990	13,870	-3,090	1,030	-17.2%	7.4%
Eastern	1,370	1,730	1,350	-360	20	-20.8%	1.5%

Seasonal agricultural employment

Agricultural reporting area	November '11 preliminary	October '11 revised	November '10 revised	Change		Percent change	
				October '11 - November '11	November '10 - November '11	October '11 - November '11	November '10 - November '11
Statewide	34,320	66,030	26,290	-31,720	8,030	-92.4%	30.6%
Western	2,070	3,310	1,880	-1,250	190	-60.4%	10.1%
South Central	10,730	24,600	6,960	-13,870	3,770	-129.3%	54.2%
North Central	7,600	16,410	4,660	-8,810	2,940	-115.9%	63.1%
Columbia Basin	6,060	12,000	4,970	-5,940	1,090	-98.0%	21.9%
South Eastern	7,670	9,090	7,740	-1,420	-70	-18.5%	-0.9%
Eastern	190	620	80	-430	110	-226.3%	137.5%

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

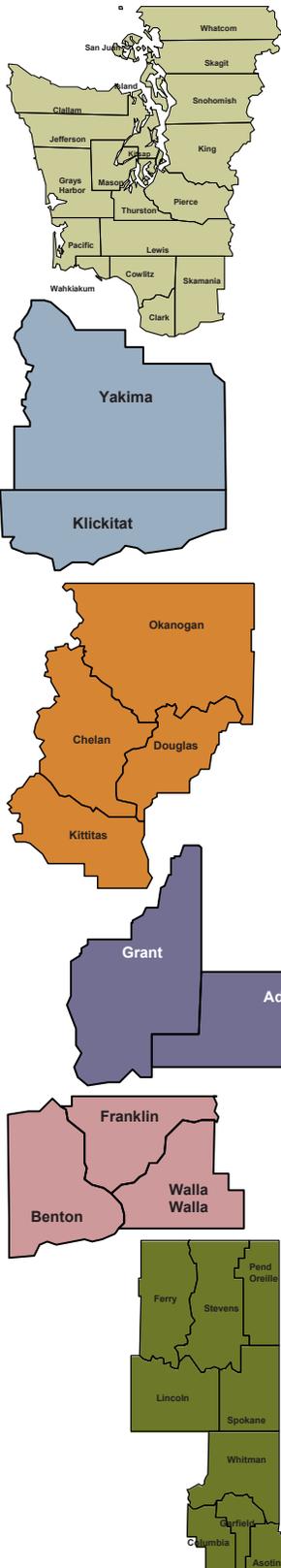
For more data and a sample of the Agricultural Labor Report survey, go to the
[November 2011 Agricultural Labor Employment and Wages Tables.](#)

[2011 Year-to-Date Employment Tables](#)
are available at www.esd.wa.gov/employmentdata

Crop, market and weather conditions by area

Factors affecting farm labor supply and demand

Washington state, November 2011



Western (Area 1)

Weather conditions were wetter and warmer than normal during the reporting period. Christmas tree growers continued their harvest. Despite a cold, slow start in the spring, Whatcom County raspberry farmers had the largest local berry harvest ever. This past summer Whatcom County farmers harvested 66.3 million pounds of raspberries, a 22 percent increase compared to 2010 and the highest one-season total ever, according to newly released data from the Washington Red Raspberry Commission. The previous record was set in 2000, when the harvest was 61.2 million pounds.

South Central (Area 2)

Weather conditions were wetter and warmer than normal during the reporting period. Winemakers were busy processing the grape harvest. Apple harvest was complete with some fruit still in the fields due to late fruit maturity and a few reports of limited field labor. The 2011 Washington apple crop is now estimated at 101.7 million 40-pound boxes, down 4 percent from the August forecast of 106.3 million boxes. This year's crop will be the state's fifth largest crop historically, trailing the record 2010 crop of 109.311 million boxes.

North Central (Area 3)

Weather conditions were wetter and warmer than normal during the reporting period. Apple harvest was being completed. Primary agricultural activities were apple harvest, apple warehouse work and carrot harvest.

Columbia Basin (Area 4)

Weather conditions were wetter and warmer than normal during the reporting period. Dry corn harvest continued, and processing carrot harvest was winding down. Late variety apple picking continued. Primary agricultural activities were apple harvest and miscellaneous warehouse work.

South Eastern (Area 5)

Weather conditions were wetter and warmer than normal during the reporting period. Apple harvest was just being completed. Washington wine growers were wrapping up a difficult season. A freeze in November of last year damaged vineyards throughout the Columbia Valley and hit the Horse Heaven Hills in south Benton County especially hard. This has caused the projected crop to be down about 20 percent this year.

Eastern (Area 6)

Seasonal employment did not meet the minimum criterion of seasonal employees and therefore is not published for the month of November.