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Agricultural Labor Employment and Wages

December 2011

Executive summary

Statewide total agricultural employment increased 4.3 percent between December 2010 and December 2011. Monthly, over the period of November 2011 through December 2011, statewide total agricultural employment decreased 22.6 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 (1,960).
- North Central (Area 3) experienced the largest total agricultural employment decrease (-160).

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
January 2012

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 4.3 percent from December 2010 to December 2011.



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Total agricultural employment

Statewide total agricultural employment increased 4.3 percent over the period of December 2010 through December 2011. Total employment decreased 22.6 percent over the period of November 2011 through December 2011.

Regional employment change over the year:

- Western (Area 1) total employment increased 0.3 percent.
- South Central (Area 2) total employment increased 11.3 percent.
- North Central (Area 3) total employment decreased 1.4 percent.
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) total employment increased 3 percent.
- South Eastern (Area 5) total employment increased 4.2 percent.
- Eastern (Area 6) total employment decreased 5.6 percent.

Seasonal agricultural employment

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment increased by 2.1 percent over the period of December 2010 through December 2011.

Agricultural activities with seasonal employment increases over the year:

- Apple work (2,060)
- Cherry work (450)
- Potato work (340)
- Other seasonal work (210)
- Blueberry work (100)
- Raspberry work (50)
- Hop work (30)
- Wheat/grain work (10)

Agricultural activities with seasonal employment decreases over the year:

- Nursery work (-650)
- Pear work (-540)
- Grapes work (-380)
- Miscellaneous vegetables work (-360)
- Onion work (-310)

Regional seasonal employment change over the year:

- Western (Area 1) seasonal employment decreased 15.8 percent due to decreased nursery work (-450).
- South Central (Area 2) seasonal employment decreased 3.7 percent due to decreased grapes work (-280).
- North Central (Area 3) seasonal employment increased 68.8 percent due to increased apple work (1,670).
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) seasonal employment increased 44.6 percent due to increased apple work (560).
- South Eastern (Area 5) seasonal employment decreased 42.1 percent due to decreased apple work (-500).
- Eastern (Area 6) seasonal employment decreased 77.8 percent due to decreased other seasonal work (-60).

Statewide and regional wage trends

Inflation-adjusted wages

Statewide, inflation-adjusted agricultural seasonal employee wages decreased 1.3 percent over the two-year period of December 2009 through December 2011. Washington state inflation-adjusted minimum wages increased 0.5 percent during the same time period. Statewide inflation-adjusted agricultural seasonal employee wages increased 0.8 percent over the one-year period of December 2010 through December 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 increased 2.9 percent.
- North Central (Area 3) seasonal wages increased 0.4 percent.
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) seasonal wages decreased 1.1 percent.
- South Eastern (Area 5) seasonal wages increased 0.5 percent.

Current dollar wages

Statewide, current dollar agricultural seasonal employee wages increased 0.7 percent over the two-year period of December 2009 through December 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 2.0 percent over the period of December 2010 through December 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 increased 4.2 percent.
- North Central (Area 3) seasonal wages increased 1.7 percent.
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) seasonal wages increased 0.1 percent.
- South Eastern (Area 5) seasonal wages increased 1.7 percent.

Statewide and regional employment trends

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment decreased 3 percent over the two-year period of December 2009 through December 2011. Statewide seasonal agricultural employment increased 2.1 percent over the one-year period of December 2010 December 2011.

Regional seasonal employment change over the year by agricultural area:

- Western (Area 1) seasonal employment decreased 15.8 percent.
- South Central (Area 2) seasonal employment decreased 3.7 percent.

- North Central (Area 3) seasonal employment increased 68.8 percent.
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) seasonal employment increased 44.6 percent.
- South Eastern (Area 5) seasonal employment decreased 42.1 percent.
- Eastern (Area 6) seasonal employment decreased 77.8 percent.

Agricultural labor supply

The weighted percent of labor shortage reported was 0 percent. For December 2011, 1,005 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

December 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: 1,810

Raspberry Sorter/Grader/Packer	390	\$ 8.90/hr	
Raspberry Pruner	300	\$ 9.11/hr	or \$ 0.15 - \$ 0.28 per plant
Blueberry Pruner	220	\$ 8.67/hr	
Misc Vegetables Sorter/Grader/Packer	190	\$ 9.37/hr	

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 3,390

Apple Pruner	1,440	\$ 9.01/hr	or \$ 1.28 - \$ 4.50 per tree
Apple Sorter/Grader/Packer	500	\$ 8.67/hr	
Apple Worker	440	\$ 9.93/hr	
Apple Hand Thinner	170	\$ 8.67/hr	

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 3,950

Apple Pruner	1,690	\$ 9.01/hr	or \$ 0.50 - \$ 1.50 per tree
Apple Sorter/Grader/Packer	750	\$ 8.93/hr	
Cherry Pruner	280	\$ 9.98/hr	
Pear Pruner	250	\$ 9.35/hr	or \$ 2.00 - \$ 5.50 per tree

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 3,210

Apple Pruner	1,500	\$ 8.77/hr	or \$ 0.50 - \$ 3.00 per tree
Potato Sorter/Grader/Packer	470	\$ 8.73/hr	
Contract Misc Labor Crew Sorter/Grader/Packer	280	\$ 8.73/hr	
Cherry Pruner	270	\$ 8.73/hr	

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 7,170

Apple Sorter/Grader/Packer	690	\$ 8.67/hr	
Apple Pruner	510	\$ 8.86/hr	
Potato Sorter/Grader/Packer	80	\$ 9.82/hr	
Apple Worker	70	\$ 8.67/hr	

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 120

Turkey Fryer Worker	30	\$13.00/hr	
Wheat Worker	30	\$12.75/hr	
Nursery & Tree Worker	20	\$11.33/hr	
Wheat Vehicle Operator	20	\$12.83/hr	

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

December 2011

Agricultural farm labor report, Washington state

Agricultural reporting area	Seasonal total	Percent of seasonal total	Permanent total	Percent of permanent total	Total employment	Percent of total employment
Western	1,810	12.6%	6,840	12.4%	8,650	15.3%
South Central	3,390	23.5%	15,840	28.7%	19,230	34.0%
North Central	3,950	27.4%	6,980	12.6%	10,930	19.3%
Columbia Basin	3,210	22.3%	3,670	6.6%	6,880	12.2%
South Eastern	1,940	13.5%	7,800	14.1%	9,740	17.2%
Eastern	120	0.8%	1,070	1.9%	1,190	2.1%
Statewide	14,420	100.0%	42,200	100.0%	56,620	100.0%

Total agricultural employment

Agricultural reporting area	December '11 preliminary	November '11 revised	December '10 revised	Change		Percent change	
				November '11 - December '11	December '10 - December '11	November '11 - December '11	December '10 - December '11
Statewide	56,620	73,190	54,270	-16,570	2,350	-22.6%	4.3%
Western	8,650	8,880	8,620	-230	30	-2.6%	0.3%
South Central	19,230	23,930	17,270	-4,700	1,960	-19.6%	11.3%
North Central	10,930	14,580	11,090	-3,650	-160	-25.0%	-1.4%
Columbia Basin	6,880	9,740	6,680	-2,860	200	-29.4%	3.0%
South Eastern	9,740	14,760	9,350	-5,020	390	-34.0%	4.2%
Eastern	1,190	1,300	1,260	-110	-70	-8.5%	-5.6%

Seasonal agricultural employment

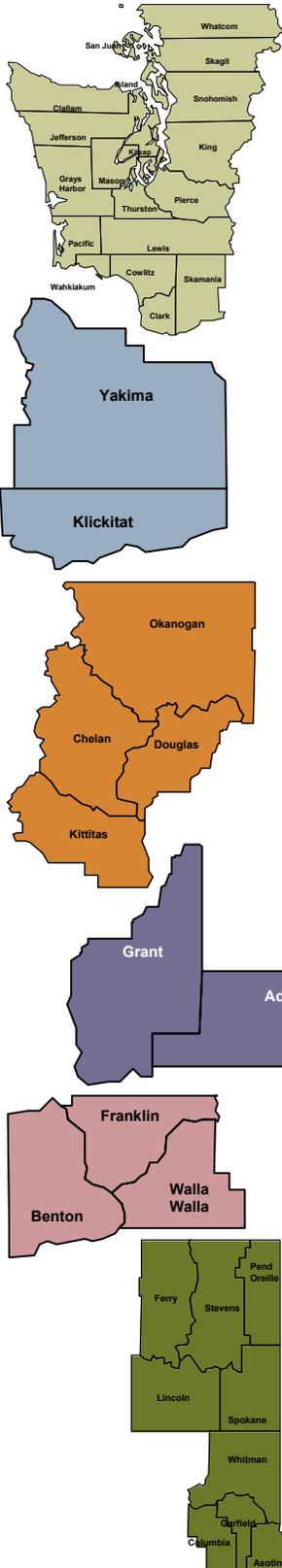
Agricultural reporting area	December '11 preliminary	November '11 revised	December '10 revised	Change		Percent change	
				November '11 - December '11	December '10 - December '11	November '11 - December '11	December '10 - December '11
Statewide	14,420	33,770	14,120	-19,350	270	-57.3%	2.1%
Western	1,810	2,060	2,150	-250	-340	-12.1%	-15.8%
South Central	3,390	10,760	3,520	-7,370	-140	-68.5%	-3.7%
North Central	3,950	7,500	2,340	-3,550	1,600	-47.3%	68.8%
Columbia Basin	3,210	6,060	2,220	-2,850	980	-47.0%	44.6%
South Eastern	1,940	7,170	3,350	-5,230	-1,410	-72.9%	-42.1%
Eastern	120	220	540	-100	-420	-45.5%	-77.8%

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 [December 2011 Agricultural Labor Employment and Wages Tables](#).

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

Factors affecting the farm labor supply and demand situation
 Crop, market and weather conditions by area
 Washington state, December 2011



Western (Area 1)

Weather conditions were colder and drier than normal during the reporting period. Primary agricultural activities were raspberry warehouse work, raspberry pruning, blueberry pruning and miscellaneous vegetables warehouse work.

South Central (Area 2)

Weather conditions were colder and drier than normal during the reporting period. Primary agricultural activities were apple pruning, apple warehouse work and apple hand thinning.

North Central (Area 3)

Weather conditions were colder and drier than normal during the reporting period. Primary agricultural activities were apple pruning, apple warehouse work, cherry pruning and pear pruning.

Columbia Basin (Area 4)

Weather conditions were colder and drier than normal during the reporting period. Primary agricultural activities were apple pruning, potato warehouse work, contract miscellaneous warehouse work and cherry pruning.

South Eastern (Area 5)

Weather conditions were colder and drier than normal during the reporting period. Primary agricultural activities were apple warehouse work, apple pruning and potato warehouse work.

Eastern (Area 6)

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