Agricultural Labor Employment and Wages

January 2012

Executive summary

Statewide total agricultural employment increased 10.6 percent between January 2011 and January 2012. Monthly, over the period of December 2011 through January 2012, statewide total agricultural employment increased 8.8 percent.

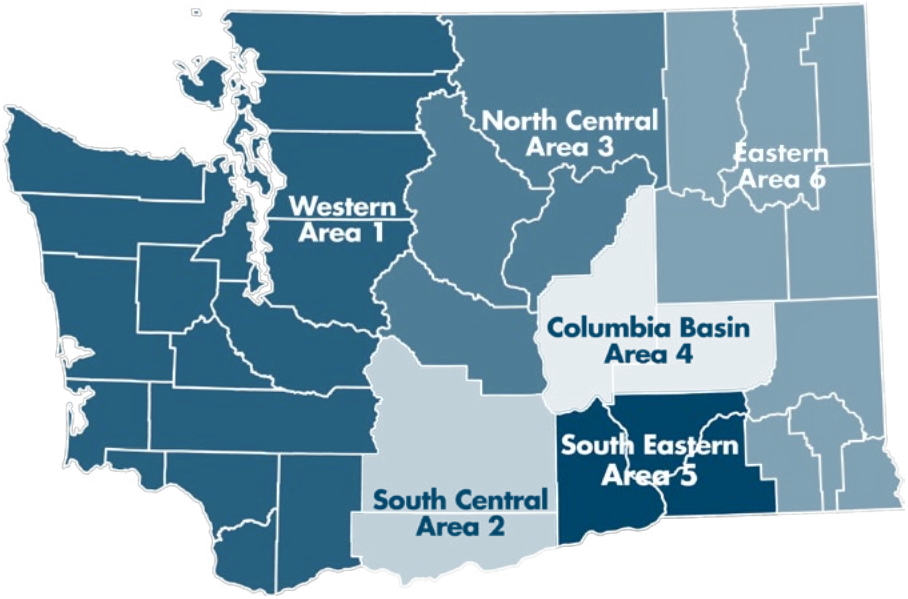
Total agricultural employment increased over the year in five of the six agricultural areas.

- South Central (Area 2) experienced the largest total agricultural employment increase (2,540).
- Western (Area 1) experienced no total agricultural employment change.

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

or visit our website, www.esd.wa.gov/employmentdata

Washington State Employment Security Department
Labor Market and Economic Analysis
February 2012

Statewide total agricultural employment increased 10.6 percent from January 2011 to January 2012.

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Total agricultural employment

Statewide total agricultural employment increased 10.6 percent over the period of January 2011 through January 2012. Total employment increased 8.8 percent over the period of December 2011 through January 2012.

Regional employment change over the year:

- Western (Area 1) total employment had no change.
- South Central (Area 2) total employment increased 13.9 percent.
- North Central (Area 3) total employment increased 6.8 percent.
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) total employment increased 10 percent.
- South Eastern (Area 5) total employment increased 18.9 percent.
- Eastern (Area 6) total employment increased 4.4 percent.

Seasonal agricultural employment

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment increased by 6.6 percent over the period of January 2011 through January 2012.

Agricultural activities with seasonal employment increases over the year:

- Other seasonal work (1,510)
- Apple work (220)
- Potato work (210)
- Raspberry work (170)
- Grapes work (80)
- Miscellaneous vegetables work (40)

Agricultural activities with seasonal employment decreases over the year:

- Onion work (-230)
- Blueberry work (-160)
- Cherry work (-160)
- Hop work (-140)
- Pear work (-90)
- Wheat/grain work (-50)

Regional seasonal employment change over the year:

- Western (Area 1) seasonal employment increased 6.9 percent due to increased raspberry work (170).
- South Central (Area 2) seasonal employment increased 2.9 percent due to increased apple work (380).
- North Central (Area 3) seasonal employment decreased 7.3 percent due to decreased apple work (-370).
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) seasonal employment increased 13.3 percent due to increased apple work (300).
- South Eastern (Area 5) seasonal employment increased 19.7 percent due to increased cherry work (680).
- Eastern (Area 6) seasonal employment increased 120 percent due to increased other seasonal work (130).

Statewide and regional wage trends

Inflation-adjusted wages

Statewide, inflation-adjusted agricultural seasonal employee wages decreased 5.7 percent over the two-year period of January 2010 through January 2012. Washington state inflation-adjusted minimum wages increased 1 percent during the same time period. Statewide inflation-adjusted agricultural seasonal employee wages increased 2.9 percent over the one-year period of January 2011 through January 2012. The inflation-adjusted state minimum wage increased 3.1 percent during the same time period.

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

- Western (Area 1) inflation-adjusted seasonal wages increased 0.2 percent over the period of January 2011 through January 2012.
- South Central (Area 2) seasonal wages increased 5.3 percent.
- North Central (Area 3) seasonal wages increased 1.7 percent.
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) seasonal wages increased 1.6 percent.
- South Eastern (Area 5) seasonal wages increased 3 percent.

Current dollar wages

Statewide, current dollar agricultural seasonal employee wages decreased 1.3 percent over the two-year period of January 2010 through January 2012. Washington state current dollar minimum wages increased 5.7 percent during this same two-year period.

Statewide current dollar agricultural seasonal employee wages increased 4.1 percent over the period of January 2011 through January 2012.

Regional wage changes over the year in current dollars:

- Western (Area 1) seasonal wages increased 1.4 percent over the period of January 2011 through January 2012.
- South Central (Area 2) seasonal wages increased 6.5 percent.
- North Central (Area 3) seasonal wages increased 2.9 percent.
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) seasonal wages increased 2.8 percent.
- South Eastern (Area 5) seasonal wages increased 4.2 percent.

Statewide and regional employment trends

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment decreased 4.3 percent over the two-year period of January 2010 through January 2012. Statewide seasonal agricultural employment increased 10.6 percent over the one-year period of January 2011 through January 2012.

Regional seasonal employment change over the year by agricultural area:

- Western (Area 1) seasonal employment showed no change during the same time period.
- South Central (Area 2) seasonal employment increased 13.9 percent.
- North Central (Area 3) seasonal employment increased 6.8 percent.
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) seasonal employment increased 10 percent.
- South Eastern (Area 5) seasonal employment increased 18.8 percent.
- Eastern (Area 6) seasonal employment increased 4.4 percent.

Agricultural labor supply

The weighted percent of labor shortage reported was 0.8 percent. For January 1,032 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 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 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.

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 current 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.

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

January 2012

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: 1,540

Raspberry Pruner	280	$ 9.04/hr	
Blueberry Pruner	270	$ 9.04/hr	
Potato Sorter/Grader/Packer	210	$ 9.93/hr	
Nursery & Tree Worker	170	$ 9.30/hr	

South Central (Area 2) (Klickitat and Yakima counties)
Estimated seasonal workforce: 6,110

Apple Pruner	3,940	$ 9.42/hr	or $ 0.35 - $ 4.00 per tree
Contract PostHarvest Sorter/Grader/Packer	480	$ 9.25/hr	
Pear Pruner	270	$10.22/hr	
Apple Sorter/Grader/Packer	230	$10.14/hr	

North Central (Area 3) (Chelan, Douglas, Kittitas and Okanogan counties)
Estimated seasonal workforce: 3,690

Apple Pruner	1,500	$ 9.58/hr	or $ 0.70 - $ 2.25 per tree
Apple Sorter/Grader/Packer	610	$ 9.04/hr	
Pear Pruner	590	$ 9.15/hr	
Cherry Pruner	370	$ 9.69/hr	

Columbia Basin (Area 4) (Adams and Grant counties)
Estimated seasonal workforce: 3,320

Apple Pruner	2,230	$ 9.09/hr	or $ 0.40 - $ 1.90 per tree
Potato Worker	330	$ 9.12/hr	
Misc Onion Sorter/Grader/Packer	160	$ 9.04/hr	
Cherry Pruner	100	$ 9.04/hr	

South Eastern (Area 5) (Benton, Franklin and Walla Walla counties)
Estimated seasonal workforce: 4,140

Apple Pruner	1,620	$ 9.04/hr	or $ 0.25 - $ 1.00 per tree
Cherry Pruner	800	$ 9.52/hr	or $ 1.35 - $ 2.50 per tree
Apple Sorter/Grader/Packer	380	Not Reported	
Potato Sorter/Grader/Packer	240	$ 9.04/hr	

Eastern (Area 6) (Asotin, Columbia, Ferry, Garfield, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Spokane, Stevens and Whitman counties)
Estimated seasonal workforce: 220

Apple Pruner	60	$ 9.14/hr
Pear Pruner	40	$ 9.10/hr
Wheat Worker	40	$12.30/hr
Nursery & Tree Worker	40	$13.00/hr

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

January 2012 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	1,540	8.1%	6,450	15.1%	7,990	13.0%
South Central	6,110	32.1%	14,760	34.6%	20,870	33.9%
North Central	3,690	19.4%	8,940	21.0%	12,630	20.5%
Columbia Basin	3,320	17.5%	4,290	10.1%	7,610	12.3%
South Eastern	4,140	21.8%	7,190	16.9%	11,330	18.4%
Eastern	220	1.2%	970	2.3%	1,190	1.9%
Statewide	19,020	100.0%	42,600	100.0%	61,620	100.0%

Total agricultural employment							
				Change		Percent change	
Agricultural reporting area	January '12 preliminary	December '11 revised	January '11 revised	December '11 - January '12	January '11 - January '12	December '11 - January '12	January '11 - January '12
Statewide	61,620	56,620	55,730	5,000	5,890	8.8%	10.6%
Western	7,990	8,650	7,990	-660	10	-7.7%	0.1%
South Central	20,870	19,230	18,330	1,640	2,540	8.5%	13.9%
North Central	12,630	10,930	11,830	1,700	810	15.6%	6.8%
Columbia Basin	7,610	6,880	6,920	730	690	10.6%	10.0%
South Eastern	11,330	9,740	9,540	1,590	1,790	16.3%	18.8%
Eastern	1,190	1,190	1,140	0	50	0.3%	4.4%

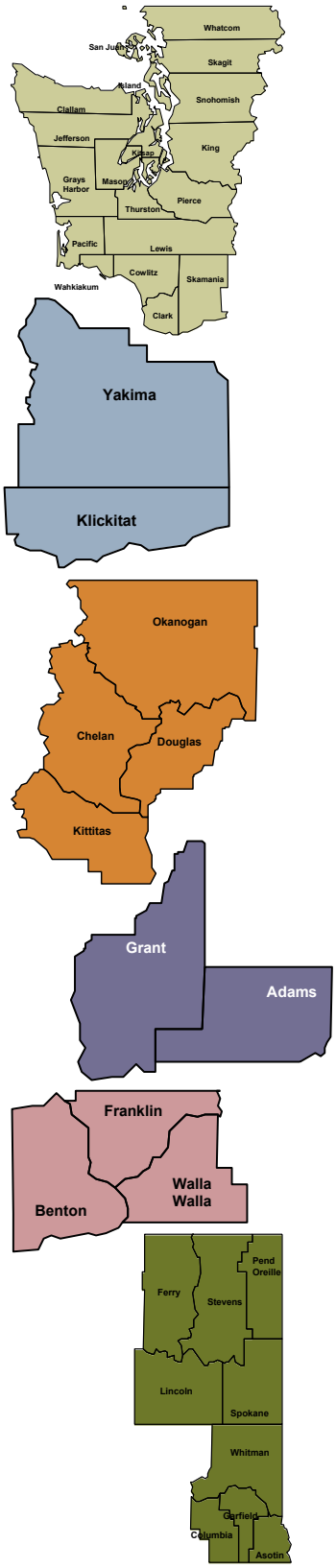
Seasonal agricultural employment							
				Change		Percent change	
Agricultural reporting area	January '12 preliminary	December '11 revised	January '11 revised	December '11 - January '12	January '11 - January '12	December '11 - January '12	January '11 - January '12
Statewide	19,020	17,730	17,840	1,270	1,170	6.7%	6.6%
Western	1,540	1,810	1,440	-270	100	-17.5%	6.9%
South Central	6,110	3,380	5,940	2,720	170	44.5%	2.9%
North Central	3,690	4,220	3,970	-540	-290	-14.6%	-7.3%
Columbia Basin	3,320	6,260	2,930	-2,940	390	-88.6%	13.3%
South Eastern	4,140	1,940	3,460	2,200	680	53.1%	19.7%
Eastern	220	120	100	100	120	45.5%	120.0%

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 January 2012 Agricultural Labor Employment and Wages Tables.

2012 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, January 2012



Western (Area 1)

Weather conditions were colder and wetter than normal during the reporting period. Primary agricultural activities were raspberry pruning, blueberry pruning, potato warehouse work and nursery and tree work.

South Central (Area 2)

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

North Central (Area 3)

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

Columbia Basin (Area 4)

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

South Eastern (Area 5)

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

The Employment Security Department is an equal-opportunity employer and provider of programs and services. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to people with disabilities.