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Agricultural Labor Employment and Wages

March 2012

Executive summary

Statewide total agricultural employment increased 6.4 percent between March 2011 and March 2012. Monthly, over the period of February 2012 through March 2012, statewide total agricultural employment increased 3.5 percent.

Total agricultural employment increased over the year in all six of the state's agricultural reporting areas.

- North Central (Area 3) experienced the largest total agricultural employment increase (1,630)
- South Central (Area 2) experienced the smallest gain in total agricultural employment (10).

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

April 2012





Statewide total agricultural employment increased 6.4 percent from March 2011 to March 2012.



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Total agricultural employment

Statewide total agricultural employment increased 6.4 percent over the period of March 2011 through March 2012. Total employment increased 3.5 percent over the period of February 2012 through March 2012.

Regional employment change over the year:

- Western (Area 1) total employment increased 6.3 percent.
- South Central (Area 2) total employment was unchanged.
- North Central (Area 3) total employment increased 12.9 percent.
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) total employment increased 7.8 percent.
- South Eastern (Area 5) total employment increased 9.6 percent.
- Eastern (Area 6) total employment increased 8.2 percent.

Seasonal agricultural employment

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment increased by 16.1 percent over the period of March 2011 through March 2012.

Agricultural activities with seasonal employment increases over the year:

- Other seasonal work (2,150)
- Apple work (1,300)
- Grapes work (700)
- Miscellaneous vegetables work (260)
- Onion work (220)
- Nursery work (190)
- Hops work (130)
- Wheat/grain work (70)
- Pear work (60)
- Raspberry work (60)

Agricultural activities with seasonal employment decreases over the year:

- Cherry work (-850)
- Potato work (-530)

Regional seasonal employment change over the year:

- Western (Area 1) seasonal employment increased 11.6 percent due to increased nursery work (160).
- South Central (Area 2) seasonal employment increased 12.2 percent due to increased other seasonal work (500).
- North Central (Area 3) seasonal employment increased 11.1 percent due to increased apple work (610).
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) seasonal employment increased 6.5 percent due to increased other seasonal work (550).
- South Eastern (Area 5) seasonal employment increased 38.2 percent due to increased apple work (960).
- Eastern (Area 6) seasonal employment increased 50 percent due to increased other seasonal work (60).

Statewide and regional wage trends

Inflation-adjusted wages

Statewide inflation-adjusted agricultural seasonal employee wages decreased 3.5 percent over the two-year period of March 2010 through March 2012. The inflation-adjusted state minimum wage increased 4.4 percent during the same time period.

Statewide inflation-adjusted agricultural seasonal employee wages increased 3.5 percent over the one-year period of March 2011 through March 2012. The inflation-adjusted state minimum wage increased 5.7 percent during the same time period.

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

- Western (Area 1) inflation-adjusted seasonal wages increased 1.5 percent.

- South Central (Area 2) seasonal wages increased 5.2 percent.
- North Central (Area 3) seasonal wages increased 2.4 percent.
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) seasonal wages increased 2.7 percent.
- South Eastern (Area 5) seasonal wages increased 4.7 percent.

Current-dollar wages

Statewide, agricultural seasonal employee wages in current dollars increased 1.1 percent over the two-year period of March 2010 through March 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 4.7 percent over the period of March 2011 through March 2012.

Regional wage changes over the year in current dollars:

- Western (Area 1) seasonal wages increased 2.7 percent.
- South Central (Area 2) seasonal wages increased 6.4 percent.
- North Central (Area 3) seasonal wages increased 3.6 percent.
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) seasonal wages increased 3.9 percent.
- South Eastern (Area 5) seasonal wages increased 5.9 percent.

Statewide and regional employment trends

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment increased 1.4 percent over the two-year period of March 2010 through March 2012.

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment increased 16.1 percent over the one-year period of March 2011 through March 2012.

Regional seasonal employment change over the year by agricultural area:

- Western (Area 1) seasonal employment increased 11.6 percent.
- South Central (Area 2) seasonal employment increased 12.2 percent.

- North Central (Area 3) seasonal employment increased 11.1 percent.
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) seasonal employment increased 6.8 percent.
- South Eastern (Area 5) seasonal employment increased 38.2 percent.
- Eastern (Area 6) seasonal employment increased 50 percent.

Agricultural labor supply

The weighted percent of labor shortage reported was 0.4 percent. For March 2012, 1,094 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 current month, previous month and previous year. Percentage

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

increase 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

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.

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

March 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: 3,180

Nursery Harvester	420	\$ 9.04/hr
Nursery Worker	320	\$ 9.74/hr
Potato Sorter/Grader/Packer	240	\$ 9.35/hr
Raspberry Pruner	240	\$ 9.04/hr

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 6,810

Apple Pruner	2,370	\$ 9.16/hr or \$ 0.30 - \$ 3.25 per tree
Grapes Pruner	1,220	\$ 9.11/hr or \$ 0.14 - \$ 0.27 per vine
Hops Planter	630	\$ 9.04/hr
Hops Worker	340	\$10.00/hr

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 5,300

Apple Pruner	1,900	\$ 9.29/hr or \$ 0.24 - \$ 3.50 per tree
Cherry Pruner	700	\$ 9.72/hr
Apple Worker	620	\$ 9.04/hr
Apple Sorter/Grader/Packer	500	\$ 9.04/hr

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 3,590

Apple Pruner	1,600	\$ 9.52/hr or \$ 0.25 - \$ 0.75 per tree
Grapes Pruner	620	\$ 9.04/hr
Apple Worker	210	\$ 9.11/hr
Contract Postharvest Sorter/Grader/Packer	150	\$ 9.04/hr

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 5,540

Apple Pruner	2,180	\$ 9.17/hr or \$ 0.75 - \$ 1.50 per tree
Grapes Pruner	1,130	\$ 9.29/hr
Apple Planter	440	\$ 9.25/hr
Potato Sorter/Grader/Packer	260	\$10.14/hr

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 180

Apple Pruner	60	\$ 9.08/hr
Pear Pruner	40	\$ 9.10/hr
Wheat Worker	30	\$10.22/hr
Contract Aerial Chemical Applicator	**	**

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

March 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	3,180	12.9%	7,110	16.9%	10,290	15.1%
South Central	6,810	27.7%	13,340	31.7%	20,150	29.6%
North Central	5,300	21.5%	8,980	21.3%	14,280	22.5%
Columbia Basin	3,590	14.6%	4,980	11.8%	8,570	13.3%
South Eastern	5,540	22.5%	6,400	15.2%	11,940	17.5%
Eastern	180	0.7%	1,270	3.0%	1,450	2.1%
Statewide	24,600	100.0%	42,080	100.0%	66,680	100.0%

Total agricultural employment

Agricultural reporting area	March '12 preliminary	February '12 revised	March '11 revised	Change		Percent change	
				February '12 - March '12	March '11 - March '12	February '12 - March '12	March '11 - March '12
Statewide	66,680	64,430	62,650	2,250	4,030	3.5%	6.4%
Western	10,290	9,650	9,680	640	610	6.6%	6.3%
South Central	20,150	19,370	20,140	780	10	4.0%	0.0%
North Central	14,280	14,450	12,650	-170	1,630	-1.2%	12.9%
Columbia Basin	8,570	8,520	7,950	50	620	0.6%	7.8%
South Eastern	11,940	11,130	10,890	810	1,050	7.3%	9.6%
Eastern	1,450	1,310	1,340	140	110	10.7%	8.2%

Seasonal agricultural employment

Agricultural reporting area	March '12 preliminary	February '12 revised	March '11 revised	Change		Percent change	
				February '12 - March '12	March '11 - March '12	February '12 - March '12	March '11 - March '12
Statewide	24,600	20,050	21,180	4,550	3,420	18.5%	16.1%
Western	3,180	2,040	2,850	1,140	330	35.8%	11.6%
South Central	6,810	5,860	6,070	950	740	14.0%	12.2%
North Central	5,300	3,930	4,770	1,370	530	25.8%	11.1%
Columbia Basin	3,590	3,880	3,360	-300	220	-8.4%	6.5%
South Eastern	5,540	4,170	4,010	1,370	1,530	24.7%	38.2%
Eastern	180	170	120	10	70	5.6%	50.0%

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 [March 2012 Agricultural Labor Employment and Wages Tables](#).

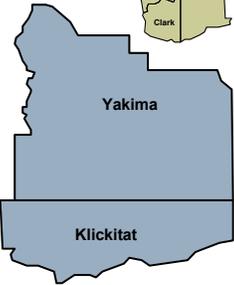
[2012 Year-to-Date Employment Tables](#) are available at www.esd.wa.gov/employmentdata

Factors affecting the farm labor supply and demand situation
 Crop, market and weather conditions by area
 Washington state, March 2012



Western (Area 1)

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



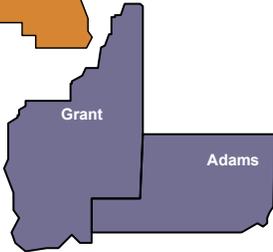
South Central (Area 2)

Weather conditions were colder and wetter than normal during the reporting period. Primary agricultural activities were apple pruning, grapes pruning and hops planting.



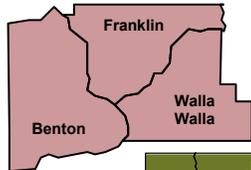
North Central (Area 3)

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



Columbia Basin (Area 4)

Weather conditions were colder and wetter than normal during the reporting period. Primary agricultural activities were apple pruning and grapes pruning.



South Eastern (Area 5)

Weather conditions were colder and wetter than normal during the reporting period. Primary agricultural activities were apple pruning, grapes pruning, apple planting 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 March 2012.

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.