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Agricultural Labor Employment and Wages

April 2012

Executive summary

Statewide total agricultural employment increased 20.6 percent between April 2011 and April 2012. Monthly, over the period of March 2012 through April 2012, statewide total agricultural employment increased 2.3 percent.

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

- South Eastern (Area 5) experienced the largest total agricultural employment increase (4,590)
- Eastern (Area 6) experienced the smallest gain in total agricultural employment (540).

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

May 2012

Statewide total agricultural employment increased 20.6 percent from April 2011 to April 2012.

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Total agricultural employment

Statewide total agricultural employment increased 20.6 percent over the period of April 2011 through April 2012. Total employment increased 2.3 percent over the period of March 2012 through April 2012.

Regional employment change over the year:

- Western (Area 1) total employment increased 13 percent.
- South Central (Area 2) total employment increased 16.8 percent.
- North Central (Area 3) total employment increased 11.2 percent.
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) total employment increased 23.1 percent.
- South Eastern (Area 5) total employment increased 41 percent.
- Eastern (Area 6) total employment increased 40.9 percent.

Seasonal agricultural employment

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment increased by 30.6 percent over the period of April 2011 through April 2012.

Agricultural activities with seasonal employment increases over the year:

- Apple work (5,776)
- Other season work (976)
- Onion work (572)
- Miscellaneous vegetables work (566)
- Raspberry work (393)
- Grapes work (354)
- Asparagus work (222)
- Hops work (88)
- Wheat/grain work (26).

Agricultural activities with seasonal employment decreases over the year:

- Cherry work (-1,075)
- Blueberry work (-172)
- Pear work (-109)
- Potato work (-97)
- Nursery work (-37)
- Other tree fruit work (-25)

Regional seasonal employment change over the year:

- Western (Area 1) seasonal employment increased 12.6 percent due to increased raspberry work (393).
- South Central (Area 2) seasonal employment increased 29 percent due to increased apple work (646).
- North Central (Area 3) seasonal employment increased 11.8 percent due to increased apple work (1,473).
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) seasonal employment increased 28.8 percent due to increased apple work (961).
- South Eastern (Area 5) seasonal employment increased 77.5 percent due to increased apple work (2,696).
- Eastern (Area 6) seasonal employment decreased 12.5 percent due to decreased nursery work (-79).

Statewide and regional wage trends

Inflation-adjusted wages

Statewide, inflation-adjusted agricultural seasonal employee wages decreased 2.8 percent over the two-year period of April 2010 through April 2012. The inflation-adjusted state minimum wage increased 4.4 percent during the same time period.

Statewide inflation-adjusted agricultural seasonal employee wages increased 2 percent over the one-year period of April 2011 through April 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 0.9 percent.
- South Central (Area 2) seasonal wages increased 1.4 percent.
- North Central (Area 3) seasonal wages increased 2.6 percent.
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) seasonal wages increased 2.2 percent.
- South Eastern (Area 5) seasonal wages increased 4.4 percent.

Current-dollar wages

Statewide, agricultural seasonal employee wages in current dollars increased 1.9 percent over the two-year period of April 2010 through April 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 3.2 percent over the one-year period of April 2011 through April 2012.

Regional wage changes over the year in current dollars:

- Western (Area 1) seasonal wages increased 2.1 percent.
- South Central (Area 2) seasonal wages increased 2.6 percent.
- North Central (Area 3) seasonal wages increased 3.8 percent.
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) seasonal wages increased 3.4 percent.
- South Eastern (Area 5) seasonal wages increased 5.6 percent.

Statewide and regional employment trends

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment increased 16.6 percent over the two-year period of April 2010 through April 2012.

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment increased 30.6 percent over the one-year period of April 2011 through April 2012.

Regional seasonal employment change over the year by agricultural area:

- Western (Area 1) seasonal employment increased 12.6 percent.
- South Central (Area 2) seasonal employment increased 29 percent.
- North Central (Area 3) seasonal employment increased 11.8 percent.
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) seasonal employment increased 28.8 percent.
- South Eastern (Area 5) seasonal employment increased 77.5 percent.
- Eastern (Area 6) seasonal employment decreased 12.5 percent.

Agricultural labor supply

The weighted percent of labor shortage reported was 6.5 percent. For April 2012, 1,119 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.

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

April 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: 3,300

Nursery Harvester	660	$ 9.04/hr
Nursery & Tree Planter	420	$ 9.09/hr
Raspberry Sorter/Grader/Packer	220	$ 9.08/hr
Misc Vegetables Planter	200	$ 9.39/hr

South Central (Area 2) (Klickitat and Yakima counties)
Estimated seasonal workforce: 8,580

Apple Hand Thinner	970	$ 9.05/hr
Apple Pruner	960	$ 9.12/hr
Hops Trainer	690	$ 9.04/hr
Grapes Trainer	530	$ 9.06/hr

North Central (Area 3) (Chelan, Douglas, Kittitas and Okanogan counties)
Estimated seasonal workforce: 5,600

Apple Worker	1,570	$ 9.07/hr
Apple Planter	770	$ 9.12/hr
Apple Grafter	640	$ 9.04/hr
Apple Pruner	600	$ 9.65/hr

Columbia Basin (Area 4) (Adams and Grant counties)
Estimated seasonal workforce: 6,710

Apple Hand Thinner	1,210	$ 9.04/hr
Apple Worker	960	$ 9.04/hr
Apple Pruner	910	$ 9.33/hr
Potato Sorter/Grader/Packer	430	$ 9.16/hr

South Eastern (Area 5) (Benton, Franklin and Walla Walla counties)
Estimated seasonal workforce: 6,870

Apple Pruner	1,210	$ 9.08/hr
Apple Worker	1,200	$ 9.07/hr
Apple Hand Thinner	760	$ 9.04/hr
Grapes Pruner	540	$ 9.50/hr

Eastern (Area 6) (Asotin, Columbia, Ferry, Garfield, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Spokane, Stevens and Whitman counties)
Estimated seasonal workforce: 280

Nursery & Tree Worker	140	$10.50/hr
Wheat Tractor Operator	40	$12.70/hr
Apricot Pruner	**	**
Contract Misc Crop Fertilizer	**	**

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

April 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	3,300	10.5%	7,660	16.0%	10,960	13.8%
South Central	8,580	27.4%	15,220	31.7%	23,800	30.0%
North Central	5,600	17.9%	9,620	20.1%	15,220	19.2%
Columbia Basin	6,710	21.4%	4,970	10.4%	11,680	14.7%
South Eastern	6,870	21.9%	8,920	18.6%	15,790	19.9%
Eastern	280	0.9%	1580	3.3%	1,860	2.3%
Statewide	31,340	100.0%	47,970	100.0%	79,310	100.0%

Total agricultural employment							
				Change		Percent change	
Agricultural reporting area	April '12 preliminary	March '12 revised	April '11 revised	March '12 - April '12	April '11 - April '12	March '12 - April '12	April '11 - April '12
Statewide	79,310	77,500	65,770	1,810	13,540	2.3%	20.6%
Western	10,960	10,760	9,700	200	1,260	1.9%	13.0%
South Central	23,800	23,730	20,370	70	3,430	0.3%	16.8%
North Central	15,220	15,430	13,690	-210	1,530	-1.4%	11.2%
Columbia Basin	11,680	10,040	9,490	1,640	2,190	16.3%	23.1%
South Eastern	15,790	15,720	11,200	70	4,590	0.4%	41.0%
Eastern	1,860	1,820	1,320	40	540	2.2%	40.9%

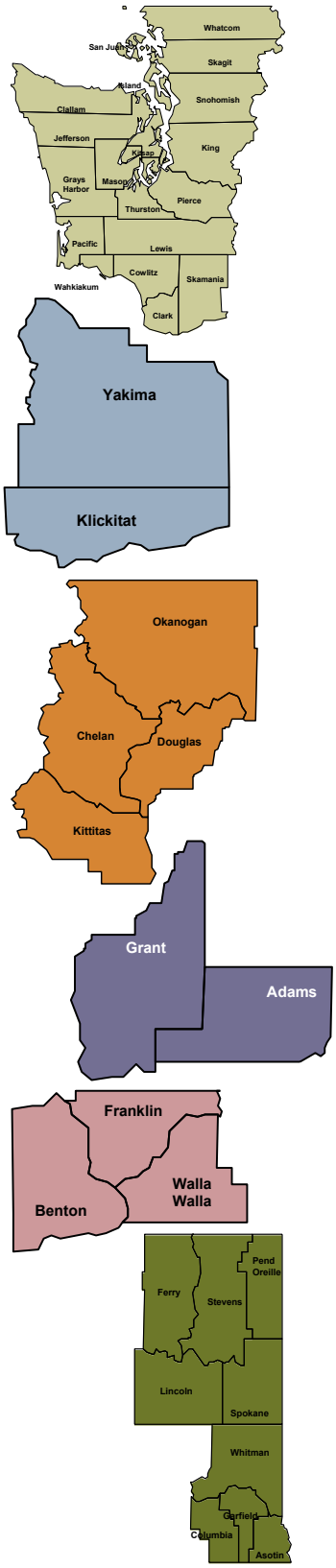
Seasonal agricultural employment							
				Change		Percent change	
Agricultural reporting area	April '12 preliminary	March '12 revised	April '11 revised	March '12 - April '12	April '11 - April '12	March '12 - April '12	April '11 - April '12
Statewide	31,340	28,040	23,990	3,300	7,350	10.5%	30.6%
Western	3,300	3,410	2,930	-110	370	-3.3%	12.6%
South Central	8,580	7,710	6,650	870	1,930	10.1%	29.0%
North Central	5,600	5,140	5,010	460	590	8.2%	11.8%
Columbia Basin	6,710	4,310	5,210	2,400	1,500	35.8%	28.8%
South Eastern	6,870	7,250	3,870	-380	3,000	-5.5%	77.5%
Eastern	280	220	320	60	-40	21.4%	-12.5%

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 April 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, April 2012



Western (Area 1)

Weather conditions were warmer and wetter than normal during the reporting period.

South Central (Area 2)

Weather conditions were warmer and wetter than normal during the reporting period. An economic-impact study released by the Washington Wine Commission shows the state's wine industry is worth $8.6 billion a year, up $3 billion from a similar study in 2006. In 2011, the wine industry accounted for 27,000 jobs in the state, up from 19,000 jobs in 2006 and 11,000 jobs in 1999.

North Central (Area 3)

Weather conditions were warmer and wetter than normal during the reporting period. Mechanical bloom thinning is still experimental but holds promise as a labor-saving means of controlling the crop load of Pacific Northwest tree fruit. In 2011, 20 to 30 percent of apple blossoms were removed in mechanical thinner trials of Jonagold, Gala, Fuji and Golden Delicious. A 50 percent goal should be attainable by some adjustments to the mechanism. Mechanical bloom thinning by tractor costs $55 to $60 an acre while hand bloom thinning of stone fruit runs $700 to $1,000 per acre.

Columbia Basin (Area 4)

Weather conditions were warmer and wetter than normal during the reporting period.

South Eastern (Area 5)

Weather conditions were warmer and wetter than normal during the reporting period. Asparagus harvest was starting to ramp up in the Tri-Cities. The state has about 100 asparagus growers, with most farming in Benton, Franklin and Yakima counties. About 70 percent of the state's asparagus is grown in Benton and Franklin counties. Laborers may cut the acres of asparagus 65 times during the 70-day harvest period. If temperatures rise above 90 degrees, workers will harvest the same fields twice in the same day.

Eastern (Area 6)

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

LM-12-0272