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# Agricultural Labor Employment and Wages

July 2012

## Executive summary

Statewide total agricultural employment increased 7.8 percent between July 2011 and July 2012. This was primarily due to a 13.1 percent increase in cherry harvest. Monthly, over the period of June 2012 through July 2012, statewide total agricultural employment increased 45.6 percent. For July 2012, 1,105 usable surveys were returned.

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

- North Central (Area 3) experienced the largest total agricultural employment increase (4,310 jobs).
- Eastern (Area 6) experienced the smallest gain in total agricultural employment (190 jobs).

### Agricultural reporting areas and their respective counties

- Area 1 – Western  
Clallam, Clark, Cowlitz, Grays Harbor, Island, Jefferson, King, Kitsap, Lewis, Mason, Pacific, Pierce, San Juan, Skagit, Skamania, Snohomish, Thurston, Wahkiakum and Whatcom
- Area 2 – South Central  
Klickitat and Yakima
- Area 3 – North Central  
Chelan, Douglas, Kittitas and Okanogan
- Area 4 – Columbia Basin  
Adams and Grant
- Area 5 – South Eastern  
Benton, Franklin and Walla Walla
- Area 6 – Eastern  
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](http://www.esd.wa.gov/employmentdata)

**Washington State  
Employment Security Department**

Labor Market and Economic Analysis

August 2012





*Statewide total agricultural employment increased 7.8 percent between July 2011 and July 2012.*



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## Total agricultural employment

Statewide total agricultural employment increased 7.8 percent over the period of July 2011 through July 2012. Total employment increased 45.6 percent over the period of June 2012 through July 2012.

Regional employment change over the year:

- Western (Area 1) total employment increased 13.6 percent.
- South Central (Area 2) total employment increased 3.4 percent.
- North Central (Area 3) total employment increased 12.6 percent.
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) total employment increased 6.4 percent.
- South Eastern (Area 5) total employment increased 5.7 percent.
- Eastern (Area 6) total employment increased 12.1 percent.

## Seasonal agricultural employment

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment increased by 7.9 percent over the period of July 2011 through July 2012.

Agricultural activities with seasonal employment increases over the year:

- Other seasonal work (5,340)
- Cherry work (5,310)
- Raspberry work (1,510)
- Miscellaneous vegetables work (1,400)
- Onion work (730)
- Other tree fruit work (590)
- Blueberry work (110)
- Pear work (100)
- Hop work (60)

Agricultural activities with seasonal employment decreases over the year:

- Apple work (-5,760)
- Strawberry work (-1,330)
- Grape work (-1,030)
- Wheat/grain work (-110)
- Potato work (-90)
- Asparagus work (-40)
- Nursery work (-30)

Regional seasonal employment change over the year:

- Western (Area 1) seasonal employment increased 23.3 percent due to increased raspberry work (1,510).
- South Central (Area 2) seasonal employment decreased 11.6 percent due to decreased cherry work (-2,800).
- North Central (Area 3) seasonal employment increased 23.8 percent due to increased cherry work (5,420).
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) seasonal employment increased 12.3 percent due to increased cherry work (1,570).
- South Eastern (Area 5) seasonal employment increased 8.4 percent due to increased other seasonal work (1,930).
- Eastern (Area 6) seasonal employment increased 100 percent due to increased other seasonal work (460).

## Statewide and regional wage trends

### Inflation-adjusted wages

Statewide, inflation-adjusted agricultural seasonal employee wages decreased 0.7 percent over the two-year period of July 2010 through July 2012. The inflation-adjusted state minimum wage increased 4.4 percent during the same two-year period.

Statewide inflation-adjusted agricultural seasonal employee wages increased 1.1 percent over the one-year period of July 2011 through July 2012. The inflation-adjusted state minimum wage increased 5.7 percent during the same period.

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

- Western (Area 1) inflation-adjusted seasonal wages increased 1.6 percent.

- South Central (Area 2) seasonal wages increased 0.7 percent.
- North Central (Area 3) seasonal wages increased 0.8 percent.
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) seasonal wages decreased 0.5 percent.
- South Eastern (Area 5) seasonal wages increased 2.1 percent.
- Eastern (Area 6) seasonal wages decreased 2.0 percent.

### Current-dollar wages

Statewide, agricultural seasonal employee wages in current dollars increased 4 percent over the two-year period of July 2010 through July 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 2.3 percent over the one-year period of July 2011 through July 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 1.9 percent.
- North Central (Area 3) seasonal wages increased 2.0 percent.
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) seasonal wages decreased 0.6 percent.
- South Eastern (Area 5) seasonal wages increased 3.3 percent.
- Eastern (Area 6) seasonal wages decreased 0.8 percent.

## Statewide and regional employment trends

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment increased 10.2 percent over the two-year period of July 2010 through July 2012.

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment increased 7.9 percent over the one-year period of July 2011 through July 2012.

Regional seasonal employment change over the year by agricultural area:

- Western (Area 1) seasonal employment increased 23.3 percent.
- South Central (Area 2) seasonal employment decreased 11.6 percent.

- North Central (Area 3) seasonal employment increased 23.8 percent.
- Columbia Basin (Area 4) seasonal employment increased 12.3 percent.
- South Eastern (Area 5) seasonal employment increased 8.4 percent.
- Eastern (Area 6) seasonal employment increased 100 percent

## Labor supply

The weighted percent of labor shortage reported was 7.4 percent. This number is based on

agricultural operators' responses to the questions: whether they failed to complete some work

due to lack of available seasonal labor; and 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. Both hourly and piece rates are used. Seasonal workers for the purpose of the survey are those working less than 150 days per year. The number of workers employed by each operator in the sample is being collected. This means that workers may be counted more than once if they are working for multiple operators in the survey sample during the pay period including the 12th of the month. 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, previous year, and previous two years. 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 the 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](http://www.nass.usda.gov/wa)

What's new in agricultural employment:

[www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usdahome](http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usdahome)

# Washington Agricultural Labor Report

## Seasonal labor abstract

### July 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: 8,790

Raspberry Harvester .....	1,930	\$ 9.10/hr
Raspberry Sorter/Grader/Packer .....	1,490	\$ 9.04/hr
Strawberry Harvester .....	**	**
Nursery Worker .....	410	\$10.08/hr

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 2,620

Cherry Harvester .....	7,160	\$ 9.76/hr or \$ 4.20 - \$ 7.25 per lug
Apple Hand Thinner .....	6,710	\$ 9.21/hr or \$ 0.50 - \$ 3.00 per tree
Cherry Sorter/Grader/Packer .....	5,260	\$ 9.17/hr
Apple Worker .....	1,050	\$ 9.84/hr

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 30,160

Cherry Harvester .....	21,010	\$ 9.23/hr or \$ 3.00 - \$ 7.25 per lug
Apple Hand Thinner .....	2,410	\$ 9.47/hr or \$ 0.80 - \$ 1.60 per tree
Contract Postharvest Sorter/Grader/Packer .....	1,850	\$ 9.04/hr
Cherry Sorter/Grader/Packer .....	1,610	\$ 9.06/hr

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 10,940

Cherry Harvester .....	4,200	\$ 9.04/hr or \$ 3.50 - \$ 6.50 per lug
Apple Hand Thinner .....	2,850	\$ 9.70/hr or \$ 0.60 - \$ 5.00 per tree
Mint Harvester .....	**	**
Blueberry Harvester .....	550	Not Reported

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 15,450

Cherry Harvester .....	5,260	\$ 9.43/hr or \$ 5.00 - \$ 6.00 per lug
Blueberry Harvester .....	4,050	\$ 9.04/hr
Apple Hand Thinner .....	3,040	\$ 9.40/hr
Grapes Trainer .....	540	\$ 9.46/hr

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 880

Apple Hand Thinner .....	120	\$ 9.88/hr
Cherry Harvester .....	120	\$ 9.09/hr
Wheat Worker .....	100	\$11.64/hr
Apple Harvester .....	50	Not Reported

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

July 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	8,790	9.5%	7,210	15.5%	16,000	11.5%
South Central	26,620	28.7%	17,120	36.9%	43,740	31.4%
North Central	30,160	32.5%	8,360	18.0%	38,520	27.7%
Columbia Basin	10,940	11.8%	4,740	10.2%	15,680	11.3%
South Eastern	15,450	16.6%	8,070	17.4%	23,520	16.9%
Eastern	880	0.9%	880	1.9%	1,760	1.3%
<b>Statewide</b>	<b>92,840</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>46,380</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>139,220</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Total agricultural employment\*

Agricultural reporting area	July '12 preliminary	June '12 revised	July '11 revised	Change		Percent change	
				June '12 - July '12	July '11 - July '12	June '12 - July '12	July '11 - July '12
<b>Statewide</b>	<b>139,220</b>	<b>95,630</b>	<b>129,160</b>	<b>43,590</b>	<b>10,070</b>	<b>45.6%</b>	<b>7.8%</b>
Western	16,000	10,820	14,080	5,180	1,920	47.9%	13.6%
South Central	43,740	32,480	42,310	11,260	1,430	34.7%	3.4%
North Central	38,520	19,750	34,210	18,770	4,310	95.0%	12.6%
Columbia Basin	15,680	12,470	14,730	3,210	950	25.7%	6.4%
South Eastern	23,520	18,510	22,260	5,010	1,260	27.1%	5.7%
Eastern	1,760	1,600	1,570	160	190	10.0%	12.1%

Seasonal agricultural employment\*

Agricultural reporting area	July '12 preliminary	June '12 revised	July '11 revised	Change		Percent change	
				June '12 - July '12	July '11 - July '12	June '12 - July '12	July '11 - July '12
<b>Statewide</b>	<b>92,840</b>	<b>57,720</b>	<b>86,030</b>	<b>35,120</b>	<b>6,810</b>	<b>37.8%</b>	<b>7.9%</b>
Western	8,790	3,770	7,130	5,020	1,660	57.1%	23.3%
South Central	26,620	21,450	30,100	5,180	-3,480	19.5%	-11.6%
North Central	30,160	12,260	24,370	17,900	5,790	59.4%	23.8%
Columbia Basin	10,940	8,340	9,740	2,590	1,200	23.7%	12.3%
South Eastern	15,450	11,330	14,250	4,120	1,200	26.7%	8.4%
Eastern	880	570	440	310	440	35.2%	100.0%

\*All total and seasonal employment numbers published in the report are not adjusted for multiple jobholders. The number of jobs is being counted, not the number of workers.

For more data and a sample of the Agricultural Labor Report survey, go to the [July 2012 Agricultural Labor Employment and Wages Tables](#).

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

# Factors affecting the farm labor supply and demand situation

## Crop, market and weather conditions by area

### Washington state, July 2012



#### Western (Area 1)

Weather conditions were warmer and drier than normal during the reporting period. Primary agricultural activities were raspberry harvest, raspberry warehouse work, strawberry harvest, and nursery work.



#### South Central (Area 2)

Weather conditions were warmer and drier than normal during the reporting period. Grape growers are predicting a 20 percent increase in harvest over last year. Predicted tonnage could even reach 170,000 tons. Last year grape growers harvested 142,000 tons, down from 160,000 tons in 2010, a drop of 11.25 percent. Primary agricultural activities were cherry harvest, apple hand thinning, cherry warehouse work, and apple work.



#### North Central (Area 3)

Weather conditions were warmer and drier than normal during the reporting period. A free trade agreement with South Korea has ramped up cherry sales to the Asian country. The state has shipped 368,000 boxes of cherries to South Korea as of the end of July. This compares with 171,000 boxes shipped by the same time last year. The shipment to South Korea for the entire season last year was 355,000 boxes. Primary agricultural activities were cherry harvest, apple hand thinning, contract postharvest warehouse work, and cherry warehouse work.



#### Columbia Basin (Area 4)

Weather conditions were warmer and drier than normal during the reporting period. The state's farmers will benefit from the nation's drought. Apples, wheat and hay grown in the milder Washington climate are expected to bring farmers higher prices and incomes. Washington is the nation's fourth-largest wheat producer. Soft white wheat, the most commonly grown in Washington is now selling in Portland for about \$9 a bushel, up from about \$7 a bushel last year. Primary agricultural activities were cherry harvest, apple hand thinning, mint harvest, and blueberry harvest.



#### South Eastern (Area 5)

Weather conditions were warmer and drier than normal during the reporting period. Potatoes are Washington's third largest crop. Last year, farmers produced about 9.8 billion pounds of potatoes, with most going to processors. Washington, the first to start harvesting potatoes, has the second-largest volume in the nation, growing about 21 percent of U.S. Potatoes, behind Idaho, which produces about 28 percent. Washington is unusual because farmers can grow more potatoes per acre than anywhere in the world. The national average is about 397 sacks per acre, but Washington farmers get an average of 615 of the 100-pound sacks, and some fields can get more than 1,000. Primary agricultural activities were cherry harvest, blueberry harvest, apple hand thinning, and grapes training.



#### Eastern (Area 6)

Weather conditions were warmer and drier than normal during the reporting period. Wheat farmers are optimistic about this year's crop. About 310 million to 315 million bushels of wheat may be harvested this year in Washington, Oregon and Idaho. Washington farmers produce the fourth-most bushels of wheat in the nation. Primary agricultural activities were apple hand thinning, cherry harvest, wheat work and apple harvest.

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