



Agricultural Labor Employment and Wages

May 2009

**Washington State
Employment Security Department**

Labor Market and Economic Analysis
Greg Weeks, Ph.D., LMEA Director



Prepared by
John Wines, *Economist*
(360) 438-4843
jwines@esd.wa.gov

Judy Anderson, *Data Compiler*

For additional
labor market information:
Labor Market Information Center
(LMIC)
1-800-215-1617
or visit us on the Web
www.workforceexplorer.com

Executive Summary

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment increased by 12.4 percent from May 2008 to May 2009.

Five of the six agricultural reporting areas saw gains in over-the-year seasonal employment.



South Central (Area 2) led the advancing areas with an increase in seasonal agricultural employment of 1,230.

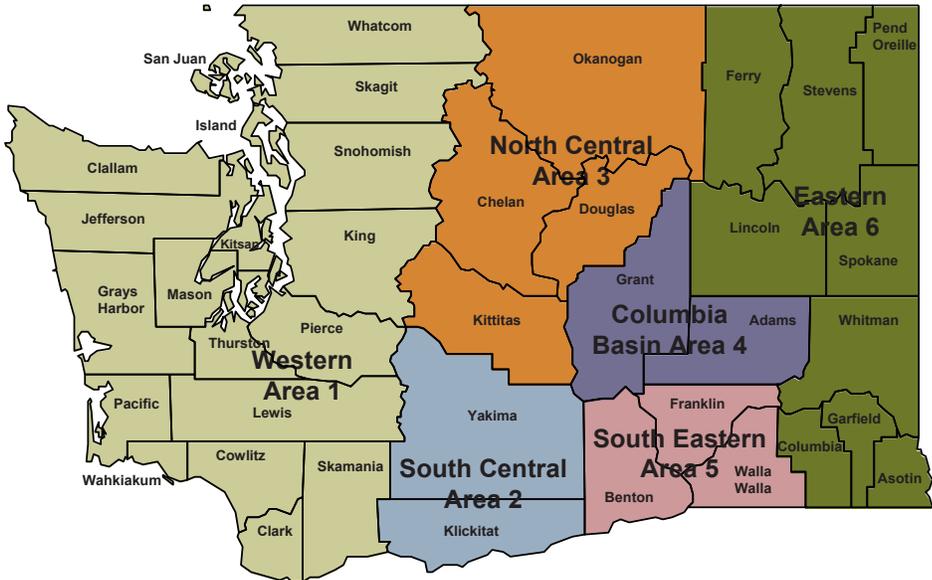
Eastern (Area 6) was the only declining area with a loss of 10 in seasonal agricultural employment.



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





Statewide total agricultural employment grew by 1.2 percent from May 2008 to May 2009.



Total Agricultural Employment Summary

Statewide total agricultural employment increased by 1.2 percent from May 2008 to May 2009. Over-the-month total employment rose by 1.9 percent. Over the year regionally, Western (Area 1) total employment fell by 1.5 percent. South Central (Area 2) total employment grew

by 4.2 percent. North Central (Area 3) total employment declined by 2.0 percent. Columbia Basin (Area 4) total employment pulled up by 1.0 percent. South Eastern (Area 5) total employment advanced by 2.8 percent. Eastern (Area 6) total employment contracted by 11.4 percent.

Seasonal Agricultural Employment Summary

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment grew by 12.4 percent from May 2008 to May 2009. Agricultural activities displaying over-the-year gains were:

- apple work (2,080),
- cherry work (650),
- other tree fruit work (630),
- asparagus work (530),
- grapes work (220),
- miscellaneous vegetables work (90),
- hops work (40), and
- strawberry work (40).

Activities displaying losses were:

- other seasonal work (-1,310),
- potato work (-560),
- nursery work (-200),
- wheat/grain work (-80),
- raspberry work (-70), and
- pear work (-20).

Across the state, Western area seasonal employment expanded by 9.6 percent, caused by an increase in other seasonal work (210). South Central seasonal employment rose by 15.8 percent, due to a growth in apple work (820). North Central seasonal employment advanced by 8.9 percent, caused by an expansion in apple work (540). Columbia Basin seasonal employment increased by 12.1 percent, caused by an increase in other seasonal work (320). South Eastern seasonal employment grew by 14.1 percent, due to an expansion in asparagus work (1,070). Eastern seasonal employment slipped by 2.0 percent, due to a decline in nursery work (-60).

Statewide and Regional Wage Trends

Statewide real (inflation-adjusted) agricultural seasonal employee wages grew by 7.1 percent from May 2007 to May 2009. Washington state real minimum wages increased by 2.3 percent during this same time period. Statewide real agricultural seasonal employee wages moved ahead by 5.3 percent from May 2008 to May 2009. The real state minimum wage grew by 2.4 percent during this same time period. Western real seasonal wages rose 1.1 percent from May 2008 to May 2009.

South Central seasonal wages crept ahead by 0.9 percent. North Central seasonal wages inched up by 0.2 percent. Columbia Basin seasonal wages moved forward by 12.6 percent. South Eastern seasonal wages expanded by 9.5 percent.

Statewide nominal agricultural seasonal employee wages grew by 12.9 percent from May 2007 to May 2009. Washington state nominal minimum wages rose by 7.8 percent during this same time period. Statewide nominal

agricultural seasonal employee wages increased by 8.9 percent from May 2008 to May 2009. The state minimum wage grew by 5.9 percent during this same time period. Western seasonal wages moved forward by 4.5 percent from May 2008 to May 2009. South Central seasonal wages expanded by 4.3 percent. North Central seasonal wages rose by 3.7 percent. Columbia Basin seasonal wages increased by 16.5 percent. South Eastern seasonal wages ramped up by 13.2 percent.

Statewide and Regional Employment Trends

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment increased by 17.4 percent from May 2007 to May 2009. Statewide seasonal agricultural employment increased by 12.4 percent from May 2008 to May 2009. Western area seasonal employment advanced by 9.6 percent during that same time period. South Central seasonal em-

ployment expanded by 15.8 percent. North Central seasonal employment climbed by 8.9 percent. Columbia Basin seasonal employment grew by 12.1 percent. South Eastern seasonal employment moved forward by 14.1 percent. Eastern seasonal employment fell by 2.0 percent.

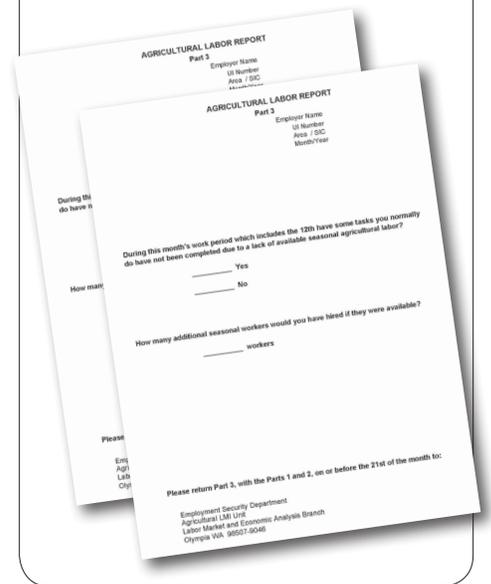
Labor Supply

The first question on the labor supply survey asks growers if they failed to complete some work due to lack of available seasonal labor. The second question asks growers how

many more employees they could have used. For May, 648 usable surveys were returned. The weighted percent of labor shortage employment reported was 0.4 percent.



*In May, 648
usable labor
supply surveys
were returned.*





Seasonal workers, for the purpose of the Farm Labor Survey, are those working less than 150 days per year.



Methodology

The *Agricultural Labor Employment and Wages* report uses data from the monthly Seasonal Farm Labor Survey. This is a survey of 600 agricultural growers in the state. They 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 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 year ago. 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 year ago. The crops having the highest

gain and highest decline in employment are highlighted in the narrative.

The Seasonal Labor Abstract is also included. This 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 the reporting of the 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 this reporting period. This can lead to some variation of estimated employment by crop when comparing activity in similar time periods. The report is intended for economists, growers' associations, educators, state agencies, labor unions, and outreach workers.

Related Ag Links

[Washington crop harvest and weather information](#)
[What's new in agricultural employment](#)

Agricultural Labor Report

Washington State Employment Security, Labor Market and Economic Analysis

Seasonal Labor Abstract

May 2009

A mid-month survey of farm labor employment and wages is conducted by the Washington State Employment Security Department. At least five percent of all growers 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 crop 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 (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: 4,010

Nursery Worker	710	\$10.07/hr
Nursery Harvester	590	\$ 8.60/hr
Other General Farm Harvester	220	\$ 9.30/hr
Raspberry Trainer	200	\$ 8.73/hr

South Central (Klickitat and Yakima counties)

Estimated seasonal workforce: 9,000

Asparagus Harvester	1,530	\$ 8.57/hr	or \$ 0.20 - \$ 0.30 per pound
Hops Trainer	1,270	\$ 9.00/hr	
Apple Pruner	1,210	\$ 8.57/hr	
Apricot Hand Thinner	780	\$ 8.55/hr	

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 4,650

Apple Hand Thinner	1,100	\$ 8.75/hr	or \$ 0.75 - \$ 3.00 per tree
Apple Worker	680	\$ 8.58/hr	
Apple Trainer	600	\$ 8.56/hr	
Apple Pruner	510	\$ 8.62/hr	

Columbia Basin (Adams and Grant counties)

Estimated seasonal workforce: 3,610

Apple Hand Thinner	650	\$ 8.65/hr	
Asparagus Harvester	450	\$ 9.00/hr	or \$ 0.22 - \$ 0.30 per pound
Cherry Hand Thinner	370	\$ 8.70/hr	
Grapes Hand Thinner	320	\$ 8.55/hr	

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 5,260

Asparagus Sorter/Grader/Packer	1,670	\$10.24/hr	
Asparagus Harvester	460	\$ 8.55/hr	or \$ 0.18 - \$ 0.24 per pound
Apple Hand Thinner	340	\$ 8.58/hr	
Hops Trainer	330	\$ 9.27/hr	

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 500

Nursery & Tree Harvester	110	\$ 8.55/hr
Wheat Tractor Operator	70	\$12.88/hr
Nursery & Tree Planter	30	\$ 9.00/hr
Grass Seed / Hay Seed Weeder	20	\$ 8.55/hr

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

Total Agricultural Employment

	May 09-Prel.	Apr 09-Rev.	May 08-Rev.	Change		Percent Change	
				Apr 09- May 09	May 08- May 09	Apr 09- May 09	May 08- May 09
State	67,070	65,800	66,260	1,270	810	1.9%	1.2%
Western	9,950	9,610	10,100	340	-150	3.5%	-1.5%
South Central	22,330	21,530	21,420	800	910	3.7%	4.2%
North Central	11,530	13,960	11,760	-2,430	-230	-17.4%	-2.0%
Columbia Basin	8,970	8,910	8,880	60	90	0.8%	1.0%
South Eastern	13,050	10,580	12,700	2,470	350	23.3%	2.8%
Eastern	1,240	1,210	1,400	30	-160	2.5%	-11.4%

Seasonal Agricultural Employment

	May 09-Prel.	Apr 09-Rev.	May 08-Rev.	Change		Percent Change	
				Apr 09- May 09	May 08- May 09	Apr 09- May 09	May 08- May 09
State	27,030	23,470	24,040	3,560	2,990	15.2%	12.4%
Western	4,010	3,430	3,660	580	350	16.9%	9.6%
South Central	9,000	7,680	7,770	1,320	1,230	17.2%	15.8%
North Central	4,650	4,980	4,270	-330	380	-6.6%	8.9%
Columbia Basin	3,610	3,180	3,220	430	390	13.5%	12.1%
South Eastern	5,260	3,770	4,610	1,490	650	39.5%	14.1%
Eastern	500	430	510	70	-10	16.2%	-2.0%

For more data and a sample of the Agricultural Labor Report survey, go to
[May 2009 Agricultural Labor Employment and Wages Tables](http://www.workforceexplorer.com)
 at www.workforceexplorer.com

Agricultural Labor Report

Factors Affecting the Farm Labor Supply and Demand Situation

Crop, Market, and Weather Conditions by Area

Washington State, May 2009



Western (Area 1)

Weather conditions were colder and wetter than normal during the reporting period. The first cutting of hay was completed. Corn and beans were being planted, and vegetable starts were being set out. Apples, strawberries, and blueberries were in full bloom. Primary agricultural activities were general nursery work, nursery harvesting, and raspberry training.

South Central (Area 2)

Weather conditions were colder and wetter than normal during the reporting period. Nighttime low temperatures forced some growers to utilize frost protection measures. Apple growers were busy with spraying and chemical fruit thinning. Cherries were finally starting to put on some size and hang from their stems. Peaches and nectarines were being hand thinned. Grapes reported to be of good quantity and quality. Primary agricultural activities were asparagus harvesting, hops training, apple pruning, and apricot hand thinning.

North Central (Area 3)

Weather conditions were colder and wetter than normal during the reporting period. Corn planting was completed and some was coming up. Timothy fields looked good and were still in vegetative growth. Primary agricultural activities were apple hand thinning, apple training, and apple pruning.

Columbia Basin (Area 4)

Weather conditions were colder and wetter than normal during the reporting period. The first cutting of alfalfa began. Most sweet corn and grain corn were planted. Dryland wheat acres were in fair condition. Primary agricultural activities were apple hand thinning, asparagus harvesting, cherry hand thinning, and grapes hand thinning.

South Eastern (Area 5)

Weather conditions were colder and wetter than normal during the reporting period. Alfalfa cutting began. More acreage was planted to field corn, while asparagus harvest continued. Winter wheat looked good overall, and spring crops were beginning to emerge. Primary agricultural activities were contract postharvest warehouse work, asparagus harvesting, apple hand thinning and hops training.

Eastern (Area 6)

Weather conditions were colder and wetter than normal during the reporting period. Primary agricultural activities were nursery and tree harvesting, wheat tractor operating, nursery and tree planting, and grass seed/hay seed weeding.