



# Agricultural Labor Employment and Wages

July 2009

## Washington State Employment Security Department

Labor Market and Economic Analysis  
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Labor Market Information Center (LMIC)  
1-800-215-1617  
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[www.workforceexplorer.com](http://www.workforceexplorer.com)

## Executive Summary

The statewide seasonal agricultural employment increased by 14.9 percent from July 2008 to July 2009. This was due to a record cherry harvest. However, cherry growers experienced a “perfect storm” this season. The large harvest could not be handled by the processors, forcing growers to let much of the smaller fruit go unpicked. The quantity of the harvest has also driven down prices to about half of last year’s level.

There were over-the-year gains in seasonal employment in three of the six agricultural areas.



An increase in seasonal agricultural employment of 6,430 in South Central led the advancing areas.

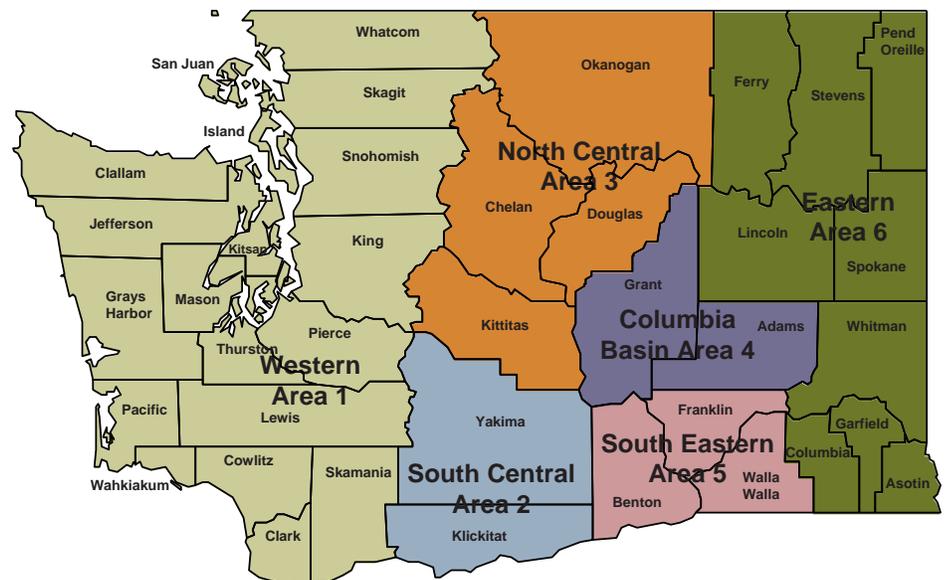
The largest decline in seasonal agricultural employment was 600 in Western (Area 1).



### 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 slipped by 0.1 percent from July 2008 to July 2009.*



## Total Agricultural Employment Summary

Statewide total agricultural employment slipped by 0.1 percent from July 2008 to July 2009. Over-the-month total employment advanced by 23.5 percent due to the large seasonal increase in the cherry harvest. Over the year regionally, Western (Area 1) total employment decreased by 3.4 percent. South Central (Area 2) total employ-

ment dipped by 0.4 percent. North Central (Area 3) total employment expanded by 3.5 percent. Columbia Basin (Area 4) total employment inched ahead by 0.5 percent. South Eastern (Area 5) total employment fell by 3.3 percent. Eastern (Area 6) total employment moved up by 1.3 percent.

## Seasonal Agricultural Employment Summary

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment ramped up by 14.9 percent from July 2008 to July 2009. Agricultural activities displaying over-the-year gains were:

- cherry work (15,010),
- other seasonal work (840),
- blueberry work (630),
- other tree fruit work (350),
- wheat/grain work (70),
- cucumber work (20), and
- asparagus work (10).

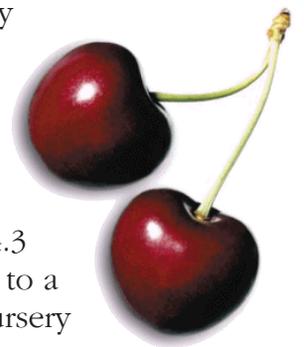
Activities displaying losses were:

- apple work (-3,210),
- raspberry work (-1,100),
- strawberry work (-860),
- onion work (-710),
- miscellaneous vegetables work (-470),
- pear work (-360),
- hops work (-300),
- potato work (-260),
- nursery work (-200),
- grapes work (-100), and
- bulbs work (-60).

Across the state, Western seasonal employment declined by 7.5 percent, caused by a decrease in raspberry work (-1,100).

South Central seasonal employment advanced by 36.9 percent, due to a growth in cherry work (6,790). North Central seasonal employment expanded by 16.3 percent, also caused by an expansion in cherry work (5,680). Columbia Basin seasonal employment fell by 0.3 percent, caused by a decline in apple work (-1,100). South Eastern seasonal employment moved ahead by 4.2 percent, due to an expansion in cherry work (990).

Eastern seasonal employment contracted by 14.3 percent, due to a decline in nursery work (-60).



## Statewide and Regional Wage Trends

Statewide real (inflation-adjusted) agricultural seasonal employee wages expanded by 6.8 percent from July 2007 to July 2009. Washington state real minimum wages increased by 2.3 percent during this same time period. Statewide real agricultural seasonal employee wages grew by 4.4 percent from July 2008 to July 2009. The real state minimum wage grew by 2.4 percent during this same time period. Western real seasonal wages moved forward by 3.8 percent from July 2008 to July 2009. South Central sea-

sonal wages advanced by 6.3 percent. North Central seasonal wages grew by 4.5 percent. Columbia Basin seasonal wages also advanced by 3.6 percent. South Eastern seasonal wages increased up by 3.3 percent. Eastern seasonal wages pulled ahead 1.6 percent.

Statewide nominal agricultural seasonal employee wages grew by 12.6 percent from July 2007 to July 2009. Washington state nominal minimum wages rose by 7.8 percent during this same time period. Statewide nominal

agricultural seasonal employee wages expanded by 8.0 percent from July 2008 to July 2009. The state minimum wage grew by 5.9 percent during this same time period. Western seasonal wages increased by 7.3 percent from July 2008 to July 2009. South Central seasonal wages jumped up by 10.0 percent. North Central seasonal wages rose by 8.1 percent. Columbia Basin seasonal wages advanced by 7.1 percent. South Eastern seasonal wages expanded by 6.8 percent. Eastern seasonal wages also increased by 5.1 percent.

## Statewide and Regional Employment Trends

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment grew by 12.4 percent from July 2007 to July 2009. Statewide seasonal agricultural employment expanded by 14.9 percent from July 2008 to July 2009. Western seasonal employment declined by 7.5 percent during that same time period.

South Central seasonal employment increased by 36.9 percent. North Central seasonal employment advanced by 16.3 percent. Columbia Basin seasonal employment slipped by 0.3 percent. South Eastern seasonal employment rose by 4.2 percent. Eastern seasonal employment decreased by 14.3 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 July, 648 usable surveys were returned. The weighted percent of labor shortage employment reported was 0.5 percent.

## [Link to Survey Methodology](#)

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

AGRICULTURAL LABOR REPORT  
Part 3  
Employer Name  
US Number  
Area / SIC  
Month/Year

During this month's work period which includes the 15th have some tasks you normally do have not been completed due to a lack of available seasonal agricultural labor?

How many \_\_\_\_\_  
Yes  
No

How many additional seasonal workers would you have hired if they were available?  
\_\_\_\_\_ workers

Please return Part 2, with the Parts 1 and 2, on or before the 21st of the month to:  
Employment Security Department  
Agricultural LMI Unit  
Labor Market and Economic Analysis Branch  
Olympia WA, 98502-5048

# Agricultural Labor Report

## Washington State Employment Security, Labor Market and Economic Analysis

### Seasonal Labor Abstract

#### July 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: 7,450

Strawberry Harvester .....	1,620	\$ 8.55/hr
Blueberry Harvester .....	640	\$ 8.55/hr
Raspberry Harvester .....	610	\$ 8.56/hr
Strawberry Worker .....	490	\$ 8.63/hr

#### **South Central (Klickitat and Yakima counties)**

Estimated seasonal workforce: 23,840

Cherry Harvester .....	7,330	\$ 8.64/hr	or \$ 0.15 - \$ 0.35 per pound
Apple Hand Thinner .....	5,800	\$ 8.69/hr	or \$ 0.25 - \$ 5.00 per tree
Cherry Sorter/Grader/Packer.....	5,240	\$ 8.61/hr	
Apricot Harvester.....	1,350	\$ 9.91/hr	

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 22,360

Cherry Harvester .....	14,900	\$ 9.27/hr	or \$ 4.25 - \$ 5.50 per lug
Apple Hand Thinner .....	2,160	\$ 9.24/hr	
Cherry Sorter/Grader/Packer.....	1,760	\$ 8.56/hr	
Apple Pruner.....	620	\$ 8.59/hr	

#### **Columbia Basin (Adams and Grant counties)**

Estimated seasonal workforce: 7,040

Apple Hand Thinner .....	2,500	\$ 8.76/hr	or \$ 0.05 - \$ 7.00 per tree
Cherry Harvester .....	2,290	\$ 8.62/hr	or \$ 4.50 - \$ 6.00 per lug
Grapes Hand Thinner .....	290	\$ 8.55/hr	
Apple Harvester .....	200	\$ 8.57/hr	

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 10,100

Apple Hand Thinner .....	4,690	\$ 8.64/hr	or \$ 0.30 - \$ 3.50 per tree
Cherry Harvester .....	1,540	\$ 8.55/hr	or \$ 4.50 - \$ 5.00 per lug
Grapes Suckering Worker .....	540	\$ 8.78/hr	
Apricot Harvester.....	430	\$ 8.55/hr	

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 540

Wheat Combine Driver.....	90	\$13.62/hr
Wheat Tractor Operator.....	40	\$13.43/hr
Wheat Vehicle Operator.....	40	\$11.86/hr
Wheat Worker.....	40	\$ 9.83/hr

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

**July 2009**  
**Agricultural Farm Labor Report, Washington State**

Agricultural Reporting Area	Seasonal Area	Seasonal Area	Permanent Area	Permanent Area	Total Area	Total Area
	Total	% of Total	Total	% of Total	Total	% of Total
1. Western	7,450	10.4%	7,060	17.5%	14,510	13.0%
2. South Central	23,840	33.4%	10,440	25.9%	34,280	30.7%
3. North Central	22,360	31.3%	8,760	21.8%	31,120	27.9%
4. Columbia Basin	7,040	9.9%	5,380	13.4%	12,420	11.1%
5. South Eastern	10,100	14.2%	7,610	18.9%	17,710	15.9%
6. Eastern	540	0.8%	990	2.5%	1,530	1.4%
State Totals	71,330	100.0%	40,240	100.0%	111,570	100.0%

**Total Agricultural Employment**

	Change				Percent Change		
	July 09-Prel.	June 09-Rev.	July 08-Rev.	June 09- July 09	July 08- July 09	June 09- July 09	
	July 09	July 09	July 09	July 09	July 09	July 09	
State	111,570	90,370	111,680	21,200	-110	23.5%	-0.1%
Western	14,510	10,330	15,020	4,180	-510	40.5%	-3.4%
South Central	34,280	28,270	34,420	6,010	-140	21.3%	-0.4%
North Central	31,120	20,170	30,060	10,950	1,060	54.3%	3.5%
Columbia Basin	12,420	11,440	12,360	980	60	8.6%	0.5%
South Eastern	17,710	18,780	18,310	-1,070	-600	-5.7%	-3.3%
Eastern	1,530	1,380	1,510	150	20	10.9%	1.3%

**Seasonal Agricultural Employment**

	Change				Percent Change		
	July 09-Prel.	June' 09-Rev.	July 08-Rev.	June 09- July 09	July 08- July 09	June 09- July 09	
	July 09	July 09	July 09	July 09	July 09	July 09	
State	71,330	50,900	62,060	20,430	9,270	40.1%	14.9%
Western	7,450	3,950	8,050	3,500	-600	88.6%	-7.5%
South Central	23,840	16,380	17,410	7,460	6,430	45.5%	36.9%
North Central	22,360	12,370	19,220	9,990	3,140	80.8%	16.3%
Columbia Basin	7,040	7,110	7,060	-70	-20	-1.0%	-0.3%
South Eastern	10,100	10,650	9,690	-550	410	-5.2%	4.2%
Eastern	540	440	630	100	-90	22.7%	-14.3%

For more data and a sample of the Agricultural Labor Report survey, go to [July 2009 Agricultural Labor Employment and Wages Tables](#)

For historical, year-to-date employment, go to [2009 Year-to-Date Employment Tables](#)  
at [www.workforceexplorer.com](http://www.workforceexplorer.com)

# Agricultural Labor Report

## Factors Affecting the Farm Labor Supply and Demand Situation

### Crop, Market, and Weather Conditions by Area

#### Washington State, July 2009



### Western (Area 1)

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



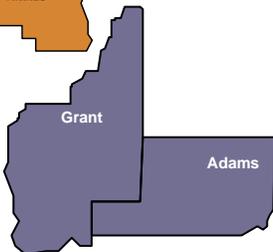
### South Central (Area 2)

Weather conditions were warmer and drier than normal during the reporting period. Cherry harvest was winding down except for the late maturing varieties. Early maturing peaches, nectarines, plums, and Bartlett pears were looking good. Green beans, cucumbers, tomatoes, and sweet corn harvest continued. Winter wheat harvest was underway.



### North Central (Area 3)

Weather conditions were warmer and drier than normal during the reporting period. Winter wheat harvest began and the second cutting of hay was underway. Many cherry growers were choosing not to harvest their crop due to market conditions. Smaller sized fruit was not being accepted at the warehouse because of the large crop. There was no processor market for the smaller cherries.



### Columbia Basin (Area 4)

Weather conditions were warmer and drier than normal during the reporting period. The second cutting of Timothy hay was winding down, and the third cutting of alfalfa was to begin soon. Onion and carrot seed harvest were also underway. Cherry harvest was mostly complete, with many growers turned back by the processors due to the large volume of cherries. Apple hand thinning continued. The dryland wheat harvest was underway, with below average yields expected.



### South Eastern (Area 5)

Weather conditions were warmer and drier than normal during the reporting period. Winter wheat harvest was in full swing, and yields and test weights were above average. The second cutting of hay was nearly complete, and the third cutting was just beginning. Primary agricultural activities were apple hand thinning, and cherry picking.



### Eastern (Area 6)

Weather conditions were warmer and drier than normal during the reporting period. Winter wheat harvest was underway. Irrigated hay fields were harvested and the first cutting of alfalfa was complete. Raspberry harvest continued, and pickers were getting ready for apricots.