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

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 Labor Employment and Wages

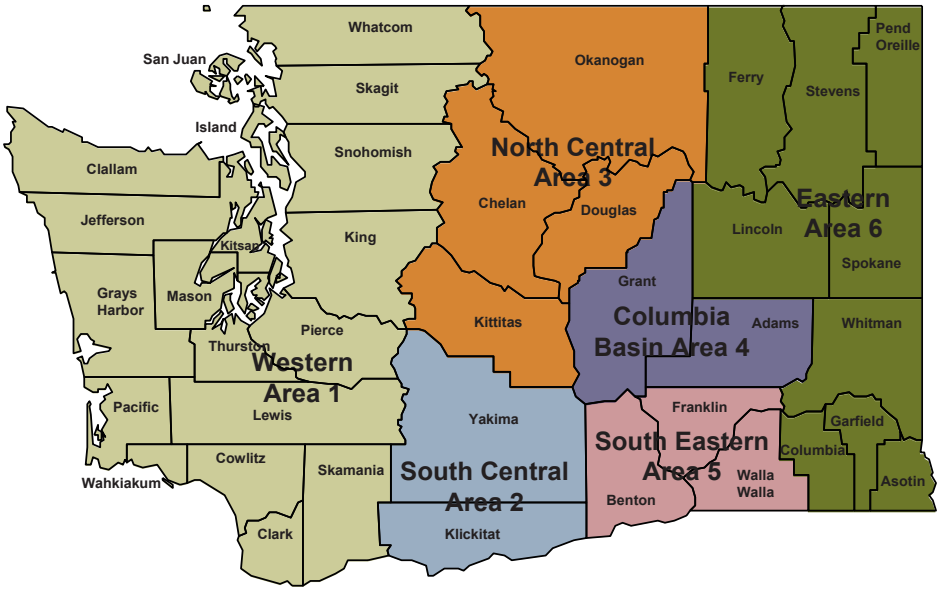
August 2008

Executive Summary

The statewide seasonal employment grew by 7.3 percent from August 2007 to August 2008 due to a larger late season cherry harvest. Hops employment also contributed to the growth due to more acreage being planted. During the last year, total acreage in hops was expected to increase by about 29 percent over 2007 levels. This was caused by a shortage of hops on world markets. Historically, seasonal hops employment experienced a decline of 67.6 percent from 1994 to 2006 due to a worldwide surplus. However, last year a shortage began to occur caused by years of declining production. This has caused prices to rise to ten times historic levels on the spot market. The impact of this is particularly felt in Washington state which accounts for 77 percent of the U.S. hops production.

- South Central (Area 2) led the four advancing areas with an increase in seasonal employment of 2,910.
- North Central (Area 3) led the two declining areas with a loss of 1,200 in seasonal employment.

Agricultural Reporting Areas in Washington State



Statewide seasonal agricultural employment grew by 7.3 percent from August 2007 to August 2008.

Total Agricultural Employment Summary

Statewide total agricultural employment declined by 3.9 percent from August 2007 to August 2008. Over-the-month total employment fell by 16.2 percent. Over the year regionally, Western (Area 1) total employment contracted by 4.1 percent. South Central (Area 2) total employment slipped by 0.1 percent. North Central (Area 3) total employment decreased by 3.7 percent. Columbia Basin (Area 4) total employment contracted by 4.7 percent. South Eastern (Area 5) total employment fell by 12.6 percent. Eastern (Area 6) total employment advanced by 14.9 percent.

Seasonal Agricultural Employment Summary

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment grew by 7.3 percent from August 2007 to August 2008. Agricultural activities displaying over-the-year gains were:

- cherry work (4,530)
- other seasonal work (1,720)
- hops work (1,520)
- wheat/grain work (530)
- grapes work (480)
- asparagus work (40)

Activities displaying losses were:

- apple work (-2,680)
- other tree fruit work (-1,170)
- onion work (-850)
- pear work (-850)
- miscellaneous vegetables work (-500)
- nursery work (-340)
- potato work (-330)
- cucumber work (-240)
- blueberry work (-230)

Across the state, Western area seasonal employment decreased by 9.0 percent, caused by a decline in potato work (-630). South Central seasonal employment ramped up by 25.2 percent, due to an increase in apple work (3,050). North Central seasonal employment fell by 10.1 percent, due to a decline in apple work (-4,890). Columbia Basin seasonal employment slipped by 0.2 percent, again caused by a contraction in apple work (-520). South Eastern seasonal employment expanded by 25.3 percent, due to a gain in other seasonal work (650). Eastern seasonal employment advanced by 60.8 percent, due to an increase in other seasonal work (350).

Statewide and Regional Wage Trends

Statewide real (inflation-adjusted) seasonal agricultural wages increased by 5.6 percent from August 2006 to August 2008. Washington state real minimum wages grew by 0.6 percent during this same time period. Statewide real agricultural seasonal wages expanded by 2.7 percent from August 2007 to August 2008. The real state minimum wage slipped by 0.2 percent during this same time period. Western real seasonal wages fell by 1.4 percent. South Central seasonal wages advanced by 5.6 percent. North Central seasonal wages grew by 8.7 percent. Columbia Basin seasonal wages moved ahead by 3.3 percent. South Eastern seasonal wages edged up by 0.8 percent. Eastern seasonal wages expanded by 17.5 percent.

Statewide nominal seasonal agricultural wages moved forward by 11.1 percent from August 2006 to August 2008. Washington state nominal minimum wages grew by 5.8 percent during this same time period. Statewide nominal agricultural seasonal wages grew by 4.6 percent from August 2007 to August 2008. The state minimum wage advanced by 1.8 percent during this same time period. Western seasonal wages inched up by 0.5 percent. South Central seasonal wages expanded by 7.6 percent. North Central seasonal wages advanced by 10.8 percent. Columbia Basin seasonal wages increased by 5.3 percent. South Eastern seasonal wages rose by 2.7 percent. Eastern seasonal wages charged ahead by 19.8 percent.

Statewide and Regional Employment Trends

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment increased by 8.2 percent from August 2006 to August 2008. Statewide seasonal agricultural employment also expanded by 7.3 percent from August 2007 to August 2008. Western seasonal employment declined by 9.0 percent. South Central seasonal employment grew by 25.2 percent gain. North Central seasonal employment slowed by 10.1 percent. Columbia Basin seasonal employment slipped by 0.2 percent. South Eastern seasonal employment moved ahead by 25.3 percent. Eastern seasonal employment ramped up by 60.8 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 August, 485 usable surveys were returned. The weighted percent of labor shortage reported was 0.6 percent.

In August, 485 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
August 2008

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, wages, and their residence. Based on these data, estimates are developed on the size of the workforce, average wages for each crop activity, and whether workers commute, live within the state, or come in from outside of Washington state. 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: 5,470

Blueberry Harvester	1,110	$ 8.08/hr	or $ 0.21 - $ 0.60 per pound
Raspberry Sorter/Grader/Packer	1,060	$ 8.40/hr	
Raspberry Harvester	**	**	
Misc Vegetables Planter	360	$ 8.11/hr	

South Central (Klickitat and Yakima counties)
Estimated seasonal workforce: 14,450

Apple Hand Thinner	3,600	$ 8.07/hr
Nectarine Harvester	1,780	$10.00/hr
Peach Harvester	1,480	$10.00/hr
Hops Weeder	**	**

North Central (Chelan, Douglas, Kittitas, and Okanogan counties)
Estimated seasonal workforce: 10,730

Cherry Harvester	4,870	$10.58/hr
Apple Pruner	1,220	$ 8.65/hr
Apple Hand Thinner	750	$ 8.25/hr
Apple Suckering Worker	570	$ 9.10/hr

Columbia Basin (Adams and Grant counties)
Estimated seasonal workforce: 6,220

Apple Hand Thinner	1,780	$ 8.59/hr	or $ 1.50 - $ 3.75 per tree
Potato Sorter/Grader/Packer	640	$ 8.38/hr	
Apple Preparation	500	$ 8.48/hr	
Carrot Weeder	**	**	

South Eastern (Benton, Franklin, and Walla Walla counties)
Estimated seasonal workforce: 7,380

Cherry Harvester	**	**
Grapes Hand Thinner	690	$ 8.20/hr
Pear Harvester	650	$ 8.07/hr
Apple Harvester	350	$ 8.77/hr

Eastern (Asotin, Columbia, Ferry, Garfield, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Spokane, Stevens, and Whitman counties)
Estimated seasonal workforce: 1,190

Wheat Vehicle Operator	340	$12.77/hr
Wheat Combine Driver	210	$15.21/hr
Apple Hand Thinner	90	$ 8.78/hr
Pear Hand Thinner	90	$ 8.78/hr

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

August 2008
Agricultural Farm Labor Report, Washington State

Agricultural Reporting Area	Seasonal Area Total	Seasonal Area % of Total	Permanent Area Total	Permanent Area % of Total	Total Area Total	Total Area % of Total
1. Western	5,470	12.2%	7,970	20.3%	13,440	15.3%
2. South Central	13,800	30.8%	13,520	34.5%	27,320	31.1%
3. North Central	10,730	24.0%	9,350	23.9%	20,080	22.8%
4. Columbia Basin	6,220	13.9%	5,050	12.9%	11,270	12.8%
5. South Eastern	7,380	16.5%	6,260	16.0%	13,640	15.5%
6. Eastern	1,190	2.7%	1,040	2.7%	2,230	2.5%
State Totals	44,790	100.0%	39,180	100.0%	87,970	100.0%

Total Agricultural Employment

				Change		Percent Change	
	Aug 08 Prel.	Jul 08 Rev.	Aug 07 Rev.	Jul 08-Aug 08	Aug 07-Aug 08	Jul 08-Aug 08	Aug 07-Aug 08
State	87,970	105,030	91,560	-17,060	-3,590	-16.2%	-3.9%
Western	13,440	15,410	14,020	-1,970	-580	-12.8%	-4.1%
South Central	27,320	31,910	27,340	-4,590	-30	-14.4%	-0.1%
North Central	20,080	31,080	20,840	-11,000	-770	-35.4%	-3.7%
Columbia Basin	11,270	11,930	11,820	-660	-550	-5.5%	-4.7%
South Eastern	13,640	12,880	15,600	760	-1,960	5.9%	-12.6%
Eastern	2,230	1,820	1,940	410	290	22.5%	14.9%

Seasonal Agricultural Employment

				Change		Percent Change	
	Aug 08-Prel.	Jul 08-Rev.	Aug 07-Rev.	Jul 08-Aug 08	Aug 07-Aug 08	Jul 08-Aug 08	Aug 07-Aug 08
State	45,440	60,510	42,330	-15,070	3,110	-24.9%	7.3%
Western	5,470	7,750	6,010	-2,280	-540	-29.4%	-9.0%
South Central	14,450	19,240	11,540	-4,790	2,910	-24.9%	25.2%
North Central	10,730	18,630	11,930	-7,900	-1,200	-42.4%	-10.1%
Columbia Basin	6,220	6,540	6,230	-320	-10	-4.9%	-0.2%
South Eastern	7,380	7,550	5,890	-170	1,490	-2.3%	25.3%
Eastern	1,190	820	740	370	450	45.1%	60.8%

For more data and a sample of the Agricultural Labor Report survey, go to
August 2008 Agricultural Labor Employment and Wages Tables
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, August 2008

Western (Area 1)

Weather conditions were warmer and drier than normal during the first half of the reporting period, and then cooler and wetter during the last half. Cannery pea harvest was in full swing with fair to good yields reported. Pea harvest continued. Wheat harvest was underway but half of the crop was still in the field.

South Central (Area 2)

Weather conditions were warmer and drier than normal during the first half of the reporting period, and then cooler and wetter during the last half. Bartlett pear, peaches, and nectarine harvests continued.

North Central (Area 3)

Weather conditions were warmer and drier than normal during the first half of the reporting period, and then cooler and wetter during the last half. Pear harvest was in full swing with average yields and above average quality reported. Early variety apple harvest was to begin soon.

Columbia Basin (Area 4)

Weather conditions were warmer and drier than normal during the first half of the reporting period, and then cooler and wetter during the last half. Spring wheat harvest was complete and winter wheat seeding began.

South Eastern (Area 5)

Weather conditions were warmer and drier than normal during the first half of the reporting period, and then cooler and wetter during the last half. The third cutting of hay was progressing. Harvests continued for nectarines, potatoes, sweet corn, and early varieties of apples. Bean harvest began.

Eastern (Area 6)

Weather conditions were warmer and drier than normal during the first half of the reporting period, and then cooler and wetter during the last half. Winter wheat harvest was mostly complete, and spring cereal harvest was slowed by precipitation. Winter wheat yields were reported to be average to below average.

Employment Security is an equal-opportunity employer and provider of programs and services. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to people with disabilities.