



# Agricultural Labor Employment and Wages

December 2008

## Washington State Employment Security Department

Labor Market and Economic Analysis  
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### Counties Within Agricultural Reporting Areas

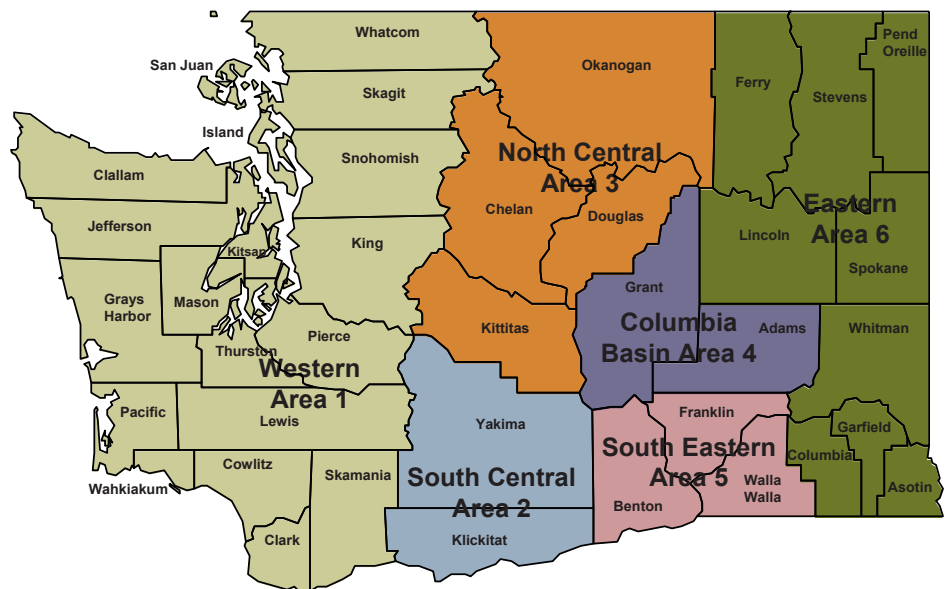
- Area 1 = Clallam, Clark, Cowlitz, Grays Harbor, Island, Jefferson, King, Kitsap, Lewis, Mason, Pacific, Pierce, San Juan, Skagit, Skamania, Snohomish, Thurston, Wahkiakum, and Whatcom
- Area 2 = Klickitat and Yakima
- Area 3 = Chelan, Douglas, Kittitas, and Okanogan
- Area 4 = Adams and Grant
- Area 5 = Benton, Franklin, and Walla Walla
- Area 6 = Asotin, Columbia, Ferry, Garfield, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Spokane, Stevens, and Whitman

## Executive Summary

The statewide seasonal employment rose by 4.8 percent from December 2007 to December 2008 due to an increase in grape pruning.

- South Central (Area 2) led the three advancing areas with an increase in seasonal employment of 1,160.
- Western (Area 1) was the largest declining area with a loss of 970 in seasonal employment.

### Agricultural Reporting Areas in Washington State



*Statewide seasonal agricultural employment advanced by 4.8 percent from December 2007 to December 2008.*



## **Total Agricultural Employment Summary**

Statewide total agricultural employment declined by 12.3 percent from December 2007 to December 2008. Over-the-month total employment fell back by 14.4 percent, caused by less apple pruning due to the inclement weather. Over the year regionally, Western (Area 1) total employment decreased by 4.9 percent. South Central

(Area 2) total employment contracted by 12.9 percent. North Central (Area 3) total employment dropped by 12.1 percent. Columbia Basin (Area 4) total employment declined by 8.2 percent. South Eastern (Area 5) total employment decreased by 24.5 percent. Eastern (Area 6) total employment inched ahead by 1.3 percent.

## **Seasonal Agricultural Employment Summary**

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment advanced by 4.8 percent from December 2007 to December 2008. Agricultural activities displaying over-the-year gains were:

- other seasonal work (420)
- raspberry work (200)
- hops work (130)
- miscellaneous vegetables work (100)
- other tree fruit work (70)
- pear work (70)
- potato work (20)
- asparagus work (10)

Activities displaying losses were:

- nursery work (-720)
- apple work (-430)
- cherry work (-280)
- blueberry work (-200)

Bulbs work was flat with no over the year change. Across the state, Western seasonal employment dropped by 37.7 percent, caused by a decline in nursery work (-680). South Central seasonal employment move ahead by 36.7 percent, due to a bump in apple work (510). North Central seasonal employment fell by 8.5 percent, caused by a decline in apple work (-170). Columbia Basin seasonal employment fell back by 20.7 percent, caused by a decline in apple work (-910). South Eastern seasonal employment jumped ahead by 89.4 percent, due to an increase in cherry work (300). Eastern seasonal employment expanded by 76.9 percent, due to an increase in wheat/grain work (100).

## Statewide and Regional Wage Trends

Statewide real (inflation-adjusted) seasonal agricultural wages advanced by 4.0 percent from December 2006 to December 2008. Washington state real minimum wages grew by 0.6 percent during this same time period. Statewide real agricultural seasonal wages also moved forward by 2.6 percent from December 2007 to December 2008. The real state minimum wage slipped by 0.2 percent during this same time period. Western real seasonal wages advanced by 3.1 percent. South

Central seasonal wages fell by 1.8 percent. North Central seasonal wages increased by 13.5 percent. Columbia Basin seasonal wages moved ahead by 4.0 percent. South Eastern seasonal wages increased by 2.8 percent.

Statewide nominal seasonal agricultural wages moved forward by 9.4 percent from December 2006 to December 2008. Washington state nominal minimum wages expanded by 5.8 percent during this same time period. Statewide nominal seasonal

agricultural wages grew by 4.6 percent from December 2007 to December 2008. The state minimum wage grew by 1.8 percent during this same time period. Western seasonal wages advanced by 5.0 percent. South Central seasonal wages inched up by 0.1 percent. North Central seasonal wages rose by 15.7 percent. Columbia Basin seasonal wages advanced by 6.0 percent. South Eastern seasonal wages grew by 4.8 percent.

## Statewide and Regional Employment Trends

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment decreased by 5.2 percent from December 2006 to December 2008. Statewide seasonal agricultural employment expanded by 4.8 percent from December 2007 to December 2008. Western seasonal employment declined by 31.0 percent. South Central seasonal employment

grew by 60.0 percent. North Central seasonal employment moved ahead by 8.4 percent. Columbia Basin seasonal employment fell by 15.3 percent. South Eastern seasonal employment contracted by 12.4 percent, due to the record apple harvest. Eastern seasonal employment ramped up by 187.5 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 employ-

ees they could have used. For December, 485 usable surveys were returned. The weighted percent of labor shortage employment reported was 0.6 percent.



*In December, 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

#### December 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, 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: 1,600

Potato Sorter/Grader/Packer. . . . .	300	\$ 8.61/hr
Raspberry Pruner . . . . .	270	\$ 8.07/hr or \$ 0.26½ - \$ 0.32 per plant
Blueberry Pruner. . . . .	140	\$ 8.20/hr
Nursery & Tree Sorter/Grader/Packer. . . . .	130	\$ 8.38/hr

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 4,320

Apple Pruner . . . . .	2,350	\$ 8.08/hr or \$ 0.55 - \$ 9.00 per tree
Grapes Pruner. . . . .	610	\$ 8.71/hr or \$ 0.16 - \$ 0.33 per vine
Pear Pruner. . . . .	400	\$ 1.50 - \$ 4.50 per tree
Nursery & Tree Sorter/Grader/Packer. . . . .	160	\$ 8.71/hr

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 2,580

Apple Pruner . . . . .	2,320	\$ 9.56/hr
Apple Sorter/Grader/Packer. . . . .	140	\$ 8.07/hr
Cherry Pruner . . . . .	50	Not Available
Alfalfa Hay Mechanized Harvester. . . . .	20	\$12.00/hr

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 1,610

Apple Pruner . . . . .	520	\$ 8.44/hr or \$ 0.30 - \$ 1.75 per tree
Potato Sorter/Grader/Packer . . . . .	290	\$ 8.12/hr
Misc Onion Sorter/Grader/Packer . . . . .	190	\$ 8.11/hr
Walla Walla Sweet Onion Sorter/Grader/Packer . . . . .	180	\$ 8.21/hr

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 1,970

Apple Pruner . . . . .	610	\$ 8.23/hr or \$ 0.80 - \$ 2.00 per tree
Cherry Pruner. . . . .	480	\$ 8.30/hr or \$ 1.25 - \$ 4.25 per tree
Grapes Pruner . . . . .	180	\$ 8.75/hr
Pear Pruner. . . . .	160	\$ 8.07/hr

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 230

Nursery Worker. . . . .	60	\$ 9.00/hr
Wheat Worker. . . . .	60	\$13.04/hr
Wheat Tractor Operator. . . . .	40	\$12.50/hr
Wheat Combine Driver. . . . .	40	\$12.00/hr

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

**December 2008**  
**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	1,600	13.0%	7,060	19.8%	8,660	18.1%
2. South Central	4,320	35.1%	10,470	29.4%	14,790	30.9%
3. North Central	2,580	21.0%	7,290	20.5%	9,870	20.6%
4. Columbia Basin	1,610	13.1%	4,690	13.2%	6,300	13.1%
5. South Eastern	1,970	16.0%	4,840	13.6%	6,810	14.2%
6. Eastern	230	1.9%	1,280	3.6%	1,510	3.1%
State Totals	12,310	100.0%	35,630	100.0%	47,940	100.0%

**Total Agricultural Employment**

	Dec 08		Nov 08		Dec 07		Change		Percent Change	
	Prel.	Rev.	Rev.	Rev.	Nov 08- Dec 08	Dec 07- Dec 08	Nov 08- Dec 08	Dec 07- Dec 08		
State	47,940	56,020	54,690	54,690	-8,080	-6,750	-14.4%	-12.3%		
Western	8,660	9,170	9,110	9,110	-510	-450	-5.6%	-4.9%		
South Central	14,790	17,270	16,980	16,980	-2,480	-2,190	-14.4%	-12.9%		
North Central	9,870	11,080	11,230	11,230	-1,210	-1,360	-10.9%	-12.1%		
Columbia Basin	6,300	7,930	6,860	6,860	-1,630	-560	-20.6%	-8.2%		
South Eastern	6,810	8,990	9,020	9,020	-2,180	-2,210	-24.2%	-24.5%		
Eastern	1,510	1,600	1,490	1,490	-90	20	-5.6%	1.3%		

**Seasonal Agricultural Employment**

	Dec 08		Nov 08		Dec 07		Change		Percent Change	
	Prel.	Rev.	Rev.	Rev.	Nov 08- Dec 08	Dec 07- Dec 08	Nov 08- Dec 08	Dec 07- Dec 08		
State	12,310	18,390	11,750	11,750	-6,080	560	-33.1%	4.8%		
Western	1,600	2,000	2,570	2,570	-400	-970	-20.0%	-37.7%		
South Central	4,320	6,170	3,160	3,160	-1,850	1,160	-30.0%	36.7%		
North Central	2,580	3,300	2,820	2,820	-720	-240	-21.8%	-8.5%		
Columbia Basin	1,610	3,510	2,030	2,030	-1,900	-420	-54.1%	-20.7%		
South Eastern	1,970	3,150	1,040	1,040	-1,180	930	-37.5%	89.4%		
Eastern	230	260	130	130	-30	100	-11.5%	76.9%		

For more data and a sample of the Agricultural Labor Report survey, go to [December 2008 Agricultural Labor Employment and Wages Tables](http://www.workforceexplorer.com) at [www.workforceexplorer.com](http://www.workforceexplorer.com)

# Agricultural Labor Report

## Factors Affecting the Farm Labor Supply and Demand Situation

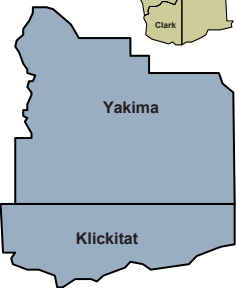
### Crop, Market, and Weather Conditions by Area

#### Washington State, December 2008



#### **Western (Area 1)**

Weather conditions were colder and wetter than normal during the reporting period. Raspberries were being pruned and tied up, and blueberries were also being pruned. Flower bulbs were being planted.



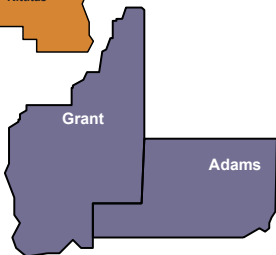
#### **South Central (Area 2)**

Weather conditions were colder and wetter than normal during the reporting period. All orchard activities ceased prior to the cold spell. Temperatures warmed up a bit near the end of the month. There were no crop damages due to weather reported.



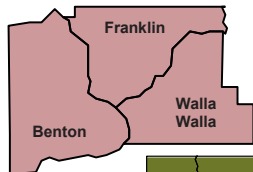
#### **North Central (Area 3)**

Weather conditions were colder and wetter than normal during the reporting period. There were no known crop or livestock problems due to the heavy snowfall. Cattle producers were feeding hay to livestock. Primary agricultural activities were apple pruning, apple warehouse work, and cherry pruning.



#### **Columbia Basin (Area 4)**

Weather conditions were colder and wetter than normal during the reporting period. Primary agricultural activities were apple pruning, potato warehouse work, and onion warehouse work.



#### **South Eastern (Area 5)**

Weather conditions were colder and wetter than normal during the reporting period. Most of the winter wheat received a good snow cover before the extremely cold temperatures. Primary agricultural activities were apple pruning, cherry pruning, grapes pruning, and pear pruning.



#### **Eastern (Area 6)**

Seasonal employment did not meet the criterion of 500 seasonal employees and therefore is not published for the month of December.