



# Agricultural Labor Employment and Wages

July 2008

## Washington State Employment Security Department

Labor Market and Economic Analysis  
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## Executive Summary

Statewide seasonal employment fell by 4.4 percent from July 2007 to July 2008 due to a smaller cherry harvest caused by poor weather in the spring. The short crop however was creating higher market prices for growers.

- North Central (Area 3) led the two declining areas with a 19.4 percent drop in seasonal employment of 4,400.



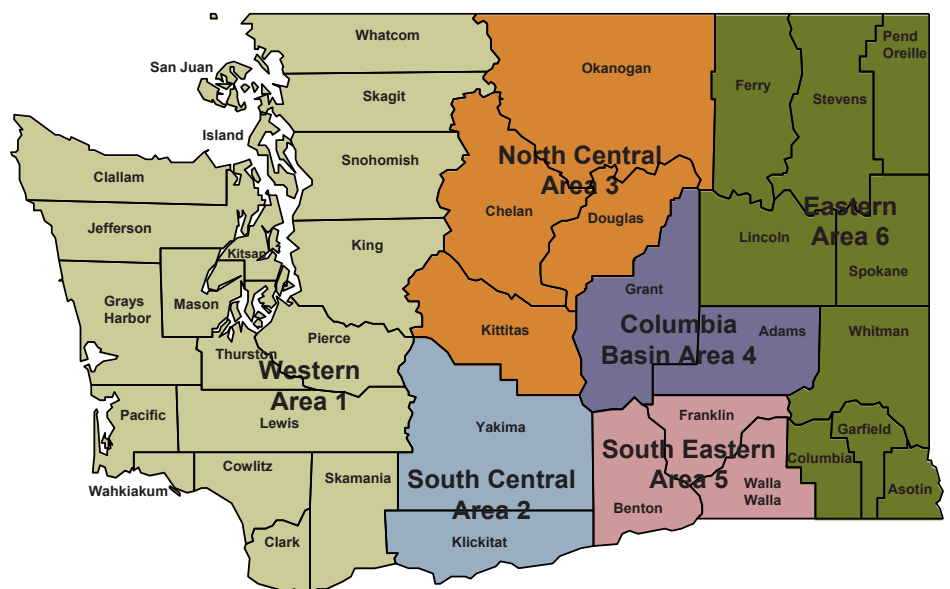
- Eastern (Area 6) led the four advancing areas with a gain of 36.7 percent in seasonal employment of 220.



## Agricultural Reporting Areas in Washington State

### 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



*Over the year statewide total agricultural employment decreased by 1.4 percent, driven by losses in North Central and South Central area employment.*



## Total Agricultural Employment Summary

Statewide total agricultural employment fell by 1.4 percent from July 2007 to July 2008. Over-the-month total employment expanded by 7.3 percent. Over-the-year regionally, Western (Area 1) total employment grew by 3.8 percent. South Central (Area 2) total employment slipped

by 2.7 percent. North Central (Area 3) total employment contracted by 10.6 percent. Columbia Basin (Area 4) total employment expanded by 7.9 percent. South Eastern (Area 5) total employment grew by 8.9 percent. Eastern (Area 6) total employment moved forward by 1.5 percent.

## Seasonal Agricultural Employment Summary

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment fell by 4.4 percent from July 2007 to July 2008.

Agricultural activities displaying over-the-year losses were:

- cherry work (-5,930)
- other tree fruit work (-2,160)
- asparagus work (-300)
- blueberry work (-300)
- miscellaneous vegetables work (-290)
- grapes work (-200)
- nursery work (-180)
- pear work (-170)
- cucumber work (-120)
- potato work (-30)
- onion work (-20)

Activities displaying gains were:

- apple work (3,480)
- other seasonal work (1,640)
- hops work (650)
- bulbs work (110)

Across the state, Western area seasonal employment increased by 0.3 percent, caused by an increase in bulbs work (110). South Central seasonal employment also inched up by 0.3 percent, due to an increase in hops work (260). North Central seasonal employment contracted by 19.4 percent, due to a decline in cherry work (-3,960). Columbia Basin seasonal employment fell by 3.0 percent, again caused by a contraction in cherry work (-840). South Eastern seasonal employment moved up by 20.8 percent, due to a gain in strawberry work (410). Eastern seasonal employment grew by 36.7 percent, due to an increase in other seasonal work (390).

## Statewide and Regional Wage Trends

Statewide real (inflation-adjusted) seasonal agricultural wages grew by 2.8 percent from July 2006 to July 2008. Washington state real minimum wages grew by 0.6 percent during this same time period. Statewide real agricultural seasonal wages increased by 1.7 percent from July 2007 to July 2008. The real state minimum wage slipped by 0.2 percent during this same time period. Western real seasonal wages slipped by 1.4 percent. South Central seasonal wages moved forward by 2.9 percent. North Central seasonal

wages increased by 3.2 percent. Columbia Basin seasonal wages advanced by 2.9 percent. South Eastern seasonal wages inched up by 0.4 percent. Eastern seasonal wages declined by 1.0 percent.

Statewide nominal seasonal agricultural wages increased by 8.1 percent from July 2006 to July 2008. Washington state nominal minimum wages grew by 5.8 percent during this same time period. Statewide nominal agricultural seasonal wages expanded

by 3.7 percent from July 2007 to July 2008. The state minimum wage advanced by 1.8 percent during this same time period. Western seasonal wages expanded by 0.5 percent from July 2007 to July 2008. South Central seasonal wages increased by 4.9 percent. North Central seasonal wages picked up by 5.2 percent. Columbia Basin seasonal wages moved up by 4.8 percent. South Eastern seasonal wages advanced by 2.3 percent. Eastern seasonal wages rose by 0.9 percent.

## Statewide and Regional Employment Trends

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment declined by 10.1 percent from July 2006 to July 2008. Statewide seasonal agricultural employment also dropped by 4.4 percent from July 2007 to July 2008. Western seasonal employment increased by 0.3 percent during that same time period. South Central seasonal employment

also inched up by 0.3 percent. North Central seasonal employment fell by 19.4 percent. Columbia Basin seasonal employment slowed by 3.0 percent. South Eastern seasonal employment moved forward by 20.7 percent. Eastern seasonal employment jumped ahead by 36.7 percent.

## Labor Supply

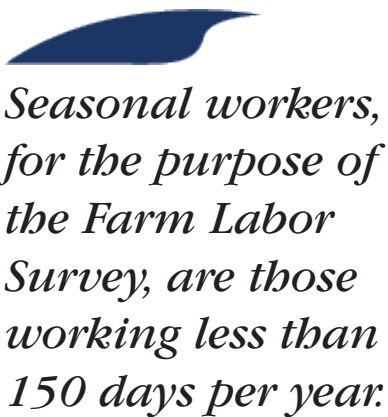
The first question on the labor supply survey asks growers if they failed to complete some work due to lack of available seasonal labor. The second question asks growers how

many more employees they could have used. For July, 560 usable surveys were returned. The weighted percent of labor shortage reported was 1.3 percent.



*In July, 560  
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.

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### 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

#### July 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: 7,530

Strawberry Harvester .....	2,120	\$ 8.46/hr
Raspberry Harvester .....	1,050	\$ 8.26/hr
Raspberry Sorter/Grader/Packer .....	**	**
Strawberry Sorter/Grader/Packer .....	330	\$ 8.40/hr

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 18,060

Apple Hand Thinner .....	5,940	\$ 8.08/hr	or \$ 0.40 - \$ 6.50 per tree
Cherry Sorter/Grader/Packer .....	4,250	\$ 8.30/hr	
Cherry Harvester .....	2,400	\$ 9.24/hr	
Apricot Harvester .....	1,280	\$ 9.07/hr	

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 18,310

Cherry Harvester .....	10,040	\$ 9.53/hr	or \$ 4.75 - \$ 6.50 per lug
Apple Hand Thinner .....	4,450	\$ 8.99/hr	
Cherry Sorter/Grader/Packer .....	2,170	\$ 8.07/hr	
Apple Pruner .....	220	\$ 8.54/hr	

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 7,080

Apple Hand Thinner .....	3,180	\$ 8.48/hr	or \$ 0.60 - \$ 4.20 per tree
Cherry Harvester .....	670	\$ 8.15/hr	
Grapes Hand Thinner .....	360	\$ 8.07/hr	
Contract Postharvest Worker .....	350	\$ 9.03/hr	

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 8,880

Apple Hand Thinner .....	3,590	\$ 8.37/hr	or \$ 0.60 - \$ 3.25 per tree
Cherry Harvester .....	1,250	\$ 8.07/hr	or \$ 4.50 - \$ 6.00 per lug
Blueberry Harvester .....	**	**	
Grapes Suckering Worker .....	440	\$ 8.07/hr	

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 820

Wheat Vehicle Operator .....	130	\$12.55/hr
Alfalfa Hay Worker .....	110	\$10.67/hr
Pear Hand Thinner .....	80	\$ 8.67/hr
Apple Hand Thinner .....	80	\$ 8.67/hr

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

**July 2008**  
**Agricultural Farm Labor Report, Washington State**

<b>Agricultural Reporting Area</b>	<b>Seasonal Area Total</b>	<b>Seasonal Area % of Total</b>	<b>Permanent Area Total</b>	<b>Permanent Area % of Total</b>	<b>Total Area Total</b>	<b>Total Area % of Total</b>
1. Western	7,530	12.4%	7,330	15.1%	14,860	13.6%
2. South Central	18,060	29.8%	12,540	25.8%	30,600	28.0%
3. North Central	18,310	30.2%	12,790	26.3%	31,100	28.5%
4. Columbia Basin	7,080	11.7%	6,580	13.5%	13,660	12.5%
5. South Eastern	8,880	14.6%	8,350	17.2%	17,230	15.8%
6. Eastern	820	1.3%	1,020	2.1%	1,840	1.7%
<b>State Totals</b>	<b>60,690</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>48,610</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>109,290</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Total Agricultural Employment**

	<b>Jul 08 Prel.</b>	<b>Jun 08 Rev.</b>	<b>Jul 07 Rev.</b>	<b>Change</b>		<b>Percent Change</b>	
				<b>Jun 08-Jul 08</b>	<b>Jul 07-Jul 08</b>	<b>Jun 08-Jul 08</b>	<b>Jul 07-Jul 08</b>
State	109,290	101,820	110,830	7,470	-1,540	7.3%	-1.4%
Western	14,860	11,850	14,310	3,010	550	25.4%	3.8%
South Central	30,600	30,980	31,440	-380	-840	-1.2%	-2.7%
North Central	31,100	21,680	34,770	9,420	-3,670	43.5%	-10.6%
Columbia Basin	13,660	13,300	12,660	370	1,000	2.8%	7.9%
South Eastern	17,230	22,340	15,830	-5,110	1,400	-22.9%	8.8%
Eastern	1,840	1,680	1,820	160	30	9.5%	1.6%

**Seasonal Agricultural Employment**

	<b>Jul 08 Prel</b>	<b>Jun 08 Rev.</b>	<b>Jul 07 Rev.</b>	<b>Change</b>		<b>Percent Change</b>	
				<b>Jun 08-Jul 08</b>	<b>Jul 07-Jul 08</b>	<b>Jun 08-Jul 08</b>	<b>Jul 07-Jul 08</b>
State	60,690	53,860	63,480	6,830	-2,790	12.7%	-4.4%
Western	7,530	4,200	7,510	3,340	20	79.5%	0.3%
South Central	18,060	17,380	18,010	690	50	4.0%	0.3%
North Central	18,310	10,710	22,710	7,600	-4,400	71.0%	-19.4%
Columbia Basin	7,080	6,460	7,300	620	-220	9.6%	-3.0%
South Eastern	8,880	14,570	7,360	-5,690	1,530	-39.1%	20.8%
Eastern	820	540	600	280	220	51.9%	36.7%

For more data and a sample of the Agricultural Labor Report survey, go to  
[July 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

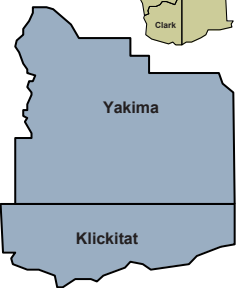
### Crop, Market, and Weather Conditions by Area

#### Washington State, July 2008



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

Weather conditions were cooler and drier than normal for the reporting period. U-Pick blueberry growers reported excellent fruit quality due to the lack of rain. Raspberry harvest and final haying operations were nearly complete. Primary agricultural activities were strawberry harvesting, raspberry harvesting, raspberry warehouse work, and strawberry warehouse work.



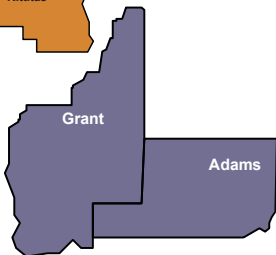
#### **South Central (Area 2)**

Weather conditions were cooler and drier than normal for the reporting period. Cherry harvest was almost complete. The cherry crop was about 50 percent of normal with some orchards with little or no fruit due to late season frosts and poor pollination conditions. All other fruits fared better. Apricot, peach, and nectarine harvest was underway. Local tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, and sweet corn were among the vegetables being harvested.



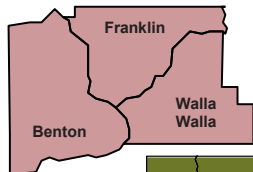
#### **North Central (Area 3)**

Weather conditions were cooler and drier than normal for the reporting period. Winter wheat harvest began with yields average to below average due to lack of timely moisture. Primary agricultural activities were cherry harvesting, apple hand thinning, cherry warehouse work, and apple pruning.



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

Weather conditions were cooler and drier than normal for the reporting period. The winter wheat harvest was in full swing with yields reported as average to mostly 10-15 percent below average. Primary agricultural activities were apple hand thinning, cherry harvesting, grapes hand thinning, and post harvest contract work.



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

Weather conditions were cooler and drier than normal for the reporting period. Reports of wheat harvesting have been favorable. Crop yields were average overall. Pea harvest was completed for the year. The last of the short season sweet corn was planted. Primary agricultural activities were apple hand thinning, cherry harvesting, and blueberry harvesting.



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

Weather conditions were cooler and drier than normal for the reporting period. Harvest progressed in the lower elevations, with winter wheat yield below normal. The second cutting of alfalfa was underway.