



# Agricultural Labor Employment and Wages

October 2008

## Washington State Employment Security Department

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

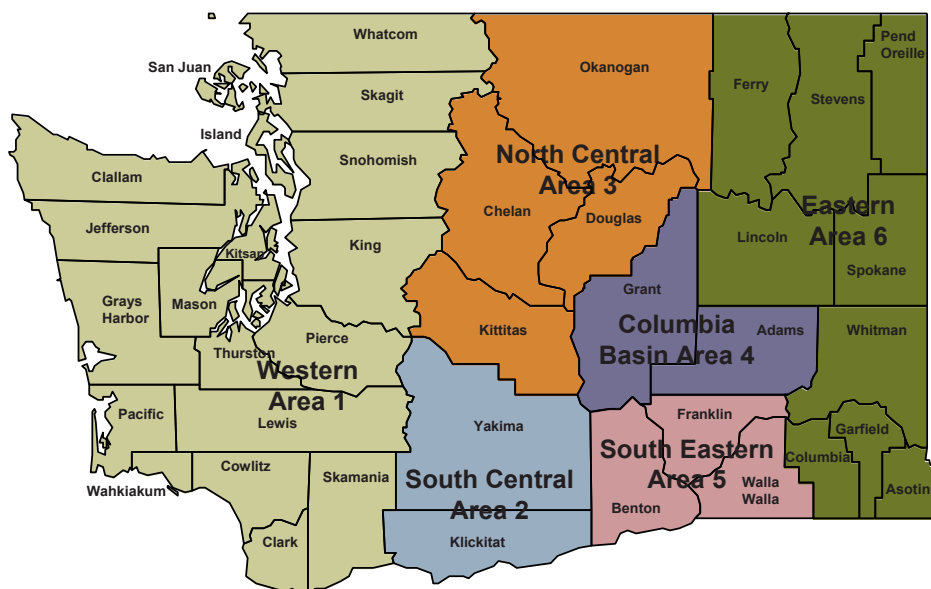
- Area 1 = Clallam, Clark, Cowlitz, Grays Harbor, Island, Jefferson, King, Kitsap, Lewis, Mason, Pacific, Pierce, San Juan, Skagit, Skamania, Snohomish, Thurston, Wahkiakum, and Whatcom
- Area 2 = Klickitat and Yakima
- Area 3 = Chelan, Douglas, Kittitas, and Okanogan
- Area 4 = Adams and Grant
- Area 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 9.9 percent from October 2007 to October 2008 due to a larger apple harvest. Fearful of losing the crop to the cold weather and frosts during the spring, growers of Golden and Red Delicious varieties did not thin as much as usual, thus producing the larger than anticipated harvest.

- South Central (Area 2) led the five advancing areas with an increase in seasonal employment of 2,060.
- Western (Area 1) was the only declining area with a loss of 450 in seasonal employment.

### Agricultural Reporting Areas in Washington State





*Statewide seasonal agricultural employment rose by 9.9 percent from October 2007 to October 2008.*



## Total Agricultural Employment Summary

Statewide total agricultural employment declined by 4.3 percent from October 2007 to October 2008. Over-the-month total employment also fell by 3.7 percent. Over the year regionally, Western (Area 1) total employment contracted by 4.8 percent. South Central (Area 2) total employment declined by

3.1 percent. North Central (Area 3) total employment decreased by 8.3 percent. Columbia Basin (Area 4) total employment registered no change. South Eastern (Area 5) total employment decreased by 5.2 percent. Eastern (Area 6) total employment inched ahead by 2.3 percent.

## Seasonal Agricultural Employment Summary

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment rose by 9.9 percent from October 2007 to October 2008. Agricultural activities displaying over-the-year gains were:

- apple work (1,670)
- other seasonal work (1,260)
- grapes work (360)
- blueberry work (200)
- hops work (190)
- wheat/grain work (50)

Activities displaying losses were:

- miscellaneous vegetables work (-440)
- potato work (-310)
- raspberry work (-170)
- nursery work (-140)
- cucumber work (-40)
- strawberry work (-20)

Crops showing no change were bulb work and other tree fruit work. Across the state, Western seasonal employment fell by 13.2 percent, caused by a decline in potato work (-340) work. South Central seasonal employment advanced by 16.3 percent, due to an increase in apple work (940). North Central seasonal employment moved forward by 10.5 percent, also due to a bump in apple work (300). Columbia Basin seasonal employment inched forward by 2.1 percent, caused by an increase in other seasonal work (130). South Eastern seasonal employment boomed ahead by 16.5 percent, due to an increase in apple work (360). Eastern seasonal employment leaped forward by 16.3 percent, due to an increase in other seasonal work (120).

## Statewide and Regional Wage Trends

Statewide real (inflation-adjusted) seasonal agricultural wages fell by 2.8 percent from October 2006 to October 2008. Washington state real minimum wages grew by 0.6 percent during this same time period. Statewide real agricultural seasonal wages also contracted by 2.2 percent from October 2007 to October 2008. The real state minimum wage slipped by 0.2 percent during this same time period. Western real seasonal wages grew by 1.9 percent from October 2007 to October 2008. South Central seasonal wages contracted

by 1.9 percent. North Central seasonal wages spiraled downward by 10.8 percent. Columbia Basin seasonal wages picked up by 5.4 percent. South Eastern seasonal wages moved ahead by 6.9 percent.

Statewide nominal seasonal agricultural wages rose by 2.2 percent from October 2006 to October 2008. Washington state nominal minimum wages grew by 5.8 percent during this same time period. Statewide nominal agricultural seasonal wages declined by 0.3 percent from

October 2007 to October 2008. The state minimum wage advanced by 1.8 percent during this same time period. Western seasonal wages expanded by 3.8 percent from October 2007 to October 2008. South Central seasonal wages showed no change. North Central seasonal wages contracted by 9.1 percent. Columbia Basin seasonal wages moved ahead by 7.4 percent. South Eastern seasonal wages advanced by 8.9 percent.

## Statewide and Regional Employment Trends

Statewide seasonal agricultural employment increased by 4.2 percent from October 2006 to October 2008. Statewide seasonal agricultural employment also expanded by 9.9 percent from October 2007 to October 2008. Western seasonal employment slid by 13.2 percent during that same time period. South

Central seasonal employment expanded by 16.3 percent. North Central seasonal employment moved forward by 10.5 percent. Columbia Basin seasonal employment inched ahead by 2.1 percent. South Eastern seasonal employment pulled ahead by 16.5 percent. Eastern seasonal employment rose by 16.3 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 October, 501 usable surveys were returned. The weighted percent of labor shortage reported was 2.2 percent.

*In October, 501  
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

#### October 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: 2,970

Potato Sorter/Grader/Packer. . . . .	690	\$ 8.83/hr
Blueberry Harvester . . . . .	460	\$ 8.07/hr
Blueberry Sorter/Grader/Packer. . . . .	240	\$ 8.36/hr
Raspberry Trainer. . . . .	200	\$ 8.07/hr

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 14,720

Apple Harvester . . . . .	10,900	\$ 8.42/hr or \$13.00 - \$35.00 per bin
Grapes Harvester. . . . .	780	\$ 9.04/hr
Hops Worker. . . . .	450	\$ 9.50/hr
Apple Pruner . . . . .	340	\$ 8.92/hr

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 15,300

Apple Harvester . . . . .	10,410	\$ 8.23/hr or \$13.00 - \$30.00 per bin
Apple Sorter/Grader/Packer. . . . .	1,290	\$ 8.46/hr
Apple Hand Thinner. . . . .	1,040	\$ 8.07/hr
Pear Sorter/Grader/Packer. . . . .	**	**

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 8,790

Apple Harvester . . . . .	6,180	\$ 8.86/hr or \$12.00 - \$28.00 per bin
Potato Sorter/Grader/Packer. . . . .	570	\$ 8.85/hr
Potato Vehicle Operator . . . . .	290	\$11.38/hr
Potato Worker . . . . .	220	\$ 8.91/hr

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 8,880

Apple Harvester . . . . .	6,160	\$ 8.64/hr or \$12.00 - \$30.00 per bin
Walla Walla Sweets Onion Sorter. . . . .	**	**
Grapes Harvester . . . . .	490	\$10.35/hr
Contract Postharvest Worker . . . . .	140	\$10.50/hr

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

Estimated seasonal workforce: 500

Apple Harvester. . . . .	170	\$ 9.00/hr
Wheat Tractor Operator. . . . .	120	\$11.00/hr
Beef Cattle Worker. . . . .	90	\$10.00/hr
Nursery Planter. . . . .	60	\$ 8.50/hr

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

**October 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	2,970	5.8%	7,490	18.8%	10,460	11.5%
2. South Central	14,720	28.8%	14,010	35.3%	28,730	31.6%
3. North Central	15,300	29.9%	5,030	12.7%	20,340	22.4%
4. Columbia Basin	8,790	17.2%	5,040	12.7%	13,830	15.2%
5. South Eastern	8,880	17.4%	6,850	17.2%	15,730	17.3%
6. Eastern	500	1.0%	1,320	3.3%	1,820	2.0%
<b>State Totals</b>	<b>51,170</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>39,740</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>90,910</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Total Agricultural Employment**

	<b>Oct 08 Prel.</b>	<b>Sep 08 Rev.</b>	<b>Oct 07 Rev.</b>	<b>Change Sep 08-Oct 08</b>	<b>Change Oct 07-Oct 08</b>	<b>Percent Change Sep 08-Oct 08</b>	<b>Percent Change Oct 07-Oct 08</b>
State	90,910	94,450	95,000	-3,540	-4,090	-3.7%	-4.3%
Western	10,460	10,940	10,990	-480	-530	-4.4%	-4.8%
South Central	28,730	30,940	29,640	-2,210	-910	-7.1%	-3.1%
North Central	20,340	22,570	22,170	-2,230	-1,830	-9.9%	-8.3%
Columbia Basin	13,830	12,550	13,830	1,280	0	10.2%	0.0%
South Eastern	15,730	15,610	16,600	120	-870	0.8%	-5.2%
Eastern	1,820	1,840	1,770	-20	50	-1.1%	2.8%

**Seasonal Agricultural Employment**

	<b>Oct 08 Prel.</b>	<b>Sep 08 Rev.</b>	<b>Oct 07 Rev.</b>	<b>Change Sep 08-Oct 08</b>	<b>Change Oct 07-Oct 08</b>	<b>Percent Change Sep 08-Oct 08</b>	<b>Percent Change Oct 07-Oct 08</b>
State	51,170	45,200	46,580	5,970	4,590	13.2%	9.9%
Western	2,970	4,040	3,420	-1,070	-450	-26.5%	-13.2%
South Central	14,720	12,060	12,660	2,660	2,060	22.1%	16.3%
North Central	15,300	13,090	13,850	2,210	1,450	16.9%	10.5%
Columbia Basin	8,790	7,220	8,610	1,570	180	21.7%	2.1%
South Eastern	8,880	8,110	7,620	770	1,260	9.5%	16.5%
Eastern	500	680	430	-180	70	-26.5%	16.3%

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

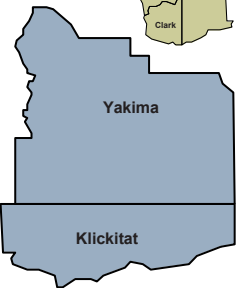
### Crop, Market, and Weather Conditions by Area

#### Washington State, October 2008



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

Weather conditions were cooler and drier than normal during the reporting period. Apple harvesting was completed two to three weeks later than usual. Agricultural producers finished planting winter cover crops on harvested corn and pea fields. Primary agricultural activities were potato warehouse work, blueberry harvesting, blueberry warehouse work, and raspberry training.



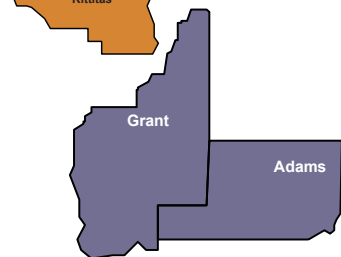
#### **South Central (Area 2)**

Weather conditions were cooler and drier than normal during the reporting period. Apple growers were harvesting the last of the Fuji and the first of the Pink Lady apple crop. Other primary agricultural activities were grape harvesting and hops work.



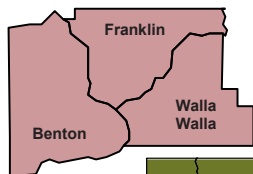
#### **North Central (Area 3)**

Weather conditions were cooler and drier than normal during the reporting period. Winter wheat was not maturing due to dry conditions at planting. Primary agricultural activities were apple harvesting, grape harvesting, hops work, and apple pruning.



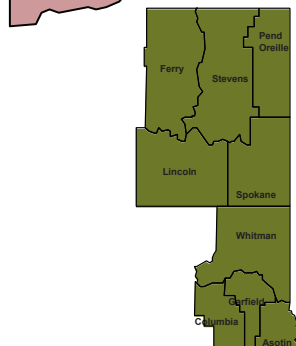
#### **Columbia Basin (Area 4)**

Weather conditions were cooler and drier than normal during the reporting period. Winter wheat seeding was completed and moisture was needed for emergence. Primary agricultural activities were apple harvesting and potato warehouse work.



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

Weather conditions were cooler and drier than normal during the reporting period. Crops showed signs of stress due to lack of moisture. Grape harvesting continued as did apple harvesting. Corn and potato harvesting neared completion. The fourth cutting of alfalfa hay was complete. Primary agricultural activities were apple harvesting, onion warehouse work, and grape harvesting.



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

Weather conditions were cooler and drier than normal during the reporting period. Primary agricultural activities were apple harvesting, wheat tractor work, beef cattle work, and nursery planting.