



Oregon Housing and Community Services

North Mall Office Building, 725 Summer St NE Suite B, Salem OR 97301-1266 - (503) 986-2000

Estimates of Farmworkers in Oregon

For more information:

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Estimates on the number of farmworkers working in Oregon vary according to the source. Research indicates that many farmworkers work part of the year for low wages and are under-served by social services.*

The Oregon Employment Department's (OED) Covered Employment and Wages represent farmworkers covered by unemployment insurance. The majority of farms in Oregon (82 percent/32,000 farms**) are too small to be covered by unemployment insurance***. Although these smaller farms employ approximately 25 percent of all farm jobs, it is difficult to estimate the number of jobs due to differences in commodity and employment practices. For the most complete and accurate assessment of farmworkers in Oregon, more than one tool of measurement must be utilized. A compilation of sources indicates a heavy use of seasonal employment of farmworkers throughout the state.

OED

OED records show that Oregon farms employ an average of 46,000 covered agricultural workers annually. These figures change throughout the year reflecting planting and harvesting times for various crops in differing locations. The non-planting, non-harvesting months such as January indicate a drop in agricultural positions to 33,000 employees. The planting and harvesting months such as June show a sharp increase—doubling the employment figures. The difference in employment among the seasons highlights the usage of seasonal employment and suggests that Oregon farms employ approximately 30,000 permanent farm workers throughout the year.

USDA Census

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) conducts a census of farms and farmworkers every five years. This census provides a count of hired farm labor by farm size and days worked. It also reports the number of farms that report using migrant farm labor. According to the latest USDA census, there were 122,845 hired farmworkers in Oregon in 2002, 27,339 of which were permanent. This figure supports the Oregon Covered Employment estimates for permanent farmworkers, but indicates a much larger use of seasonal farm labor. Although the USDA figure does not account for the possibility of duplicate counting (a farmer who may work for more than one farm), it does not include any custom or contract work or food processors, all of which are included in OHCS definition of farmworker.

Enumeration Study

A third source of information supports both the covered employment and the USDA figures. The Alice Larson Enumeration Study also conducted in 2002 uses different methodology, and does account for the possibility of duplication and "underemployment".****

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The Larson study findings were extremely supportive of the USDA count for seasonal farmworkers. The USDA census counted 95,506 **seasonal** farmworkers. The Larson Enumeration study estimated 94,648 **seasonal** farmworkers (this number rises to 103,453 when food processing workers are included).

Using all available sources, it is a reliable estimate that Oregon farms employ approximately 123,000 agricultural employees annually, of which 95,000 are seasonal (77 percent).

Oregon Agricultural Labor Force Compared to Neighboring States

Chart: http://www.ohcs.oregon.gov/OHCS/ISD/PPR/docs/Occupational_Employment_Statistics_Chart.pdf

Source: <http://www.bls.gov/oes/home.htm>

2001-2004 OED figures for Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting:

Chart: http://www.ohcs.oregon.gov/OHCS/ISD/PPR/docs/OED_Figures_2001-2004.pdf

Source: <http://www.qualityinfo.org/olmisj/CEP>

U.S. Department of Agriculture Oregon Census

Chart:

www.ohcs.oregon.gov/OHCS/ISD/PPR/docs/Department_of_Agriculture_Census_Chart.pdf

Source: <http://www.nass.usda.gov/census/>

Alice Larson Enumeration Study

<http://www.ohcs.oregon.gov/OHCS/ISD/PPR/docs/FWICEenumerationstudy.pdf>

Composition of estimates: US Census, US Dept of Ag. Census, OED, and Larson Study

http://www.ohcs.oregon.gov/OHCS/ISD/PPR/docs/Estimates_Of_Farmworkers_In_Oregon.pdf

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Regional Estimates of farmworkers from the Oregon Labor Market Information System (OLMIS) indicate which Oregon counties are the large agriculture producers for the state. The following chart indicates the Marion/Polk/Yamhill region, the Multnomah/Washington region and the Clackamas region are the biggest agriculture employers of farmworkers and laborers, crop, nursery and greenhouse. (The Portland PMSA and Salem MSA are also listed as top agriculture producers, these areas include the counties listed above.)

Regional OED Estimates for Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting

Chart:

http://www.ohcs.oregon.gov/OHCS/ISD/PPR/docs/Geographic_Profile_Chart.pdf

Source: <http://www.qualityinfo.org/olmisj/CEP>

Growing Regions

<http://oregon.gov/ODA/regions.shtml>

Migrant Workers

Migrant workers are especially difficult to locate due to their mobility, temporary employment, and housing, and language and cultural barriers. These same factors contribute to their vulnerability to inadequate living conditions. The lack of permanent employment makes it difficult for this population to locate and afford adequate housing, access to health care, and support family members.

The USDA census does not count the number of migrant workers but does report that in 2002 over 1800 Oregon farms reported using migrant labor. The Alice Larson Enumeration Study estimates 35,670 migrant workers (not including food processors) in Oregon annually with 12,545 migrant children and youth. If food processors are included in the definition of farm worker, this number rises to 39,900 migrant workers with 14,232 children and youth.

A resource that highlights the presence of migrant workers in various Oregon counties is the Department of Education Migrant Education Program. The definition of migrant for this organization is any family who has been forced to relocate for agricultural work within a three-year period.

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The Oregon Migrant Education Program enrolled 30,710 migrant students ages 3 to 21 years in the year 2002–2003. Enrollment has been over 29,000 children since the 1999–2000 school year, with an average enrollment of 29,966 from 1999–2003.

Although enrollment into the Migrant Education Program represents a duplicated count, it is an important tool for understanding migrant populations regionally. The Willamette Extended School District (Linn, Benton, Lincoln, Polk Counties) reported the highest number of enrollees with 4,445 in the 2002–2003 school year. The Salem-Keizer School District, Portland School District, Hillsboro School District, and Woodburn School District round out the top five migrant enrollment communities.

For more information on this program, visit: http://www.wesd.org/omesc/omesc_home.asp

References

* The National Agricultural Workers Study. United States Department of Agriculture. 1997-1998. Farm Workers in Oregon. A Study of the League of Women Voters of Oregon Education Fund. Fall 2000. Fitting The Pieces Together: An Examination of Sources Related to Farmworker Housing. Housing Assistance Council, 1996.

** 1997 Department of Agriculture Census

*** Farms who employ less than 10 employees are not covered and therefore do not have to report their employees or hiring practices.

**** The practice of farms to employ more than one farmworker per one FTE position. This practice is common among farms with crops that have a short harvest season, such as berries.

For More Information

For more program information, contact Vicki Massey at 503.986.2146 or by E-mail:

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OHCS is the state housing finance agency, providing financial and program support to create and preserve opportunities for quality, affordable housing for lower income Oregonians. The agency also administers federal and state antipoverty, homeless and energy assistance community service programs.

