

Asotin County profile

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Overview

Regional context

Asotin County, established in 1883, is in the farthest southeastern corner of Washington, bounded on the east by Idaho and on the south by Oregon. Garfield County makes up its western border and part of its northern border as well. The balance of its northern border is shared with Whitman County.

Before white exploration and settlement, the semi-nomadic Nez Perce inhabited what is now Asotin County. Tribes on both sides of the Nez Perce Trail used it for commerce, which was of strategic importance to the development of the region. Modern-day highways largely parallel the old trail.

The establishment of the territory and the end of the Indian Wars resulted in an influx of white settlers into the county. Asotin, a former Nez Perce village, attracted settlers who were producing cattle, fruit and vegetables for mining camps in Idaho by 1868. Most economic development in the county was linked to mining activity in Idaho.

By the 1950s, agriculture dominated Asotin County's economy with grain crops, such as wheat and barley, as well as peas, berries, tree fruits and nuts, which were clustered near the river. The food processing industry grew up around these crops and the meat and dairy farms.

The dense stands of fir in the Blue Mountains made lumber and wood products a growth industry. Hunting and other outdoor recreation have been growth industries too. The completion of the Lower Granite Dam in 1975 shut down orchard and beef-processing activities along the river as land was submerged, but it created one of the longest inland water routes in the nation. Agriculture remained important, but now shared top billing with port activity at Clarkston-Lewiston and the federal U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which operated the dam. Population growth followed the port activity at both Clarkston and Lewiston, fueling trade and service sectors catering to their needs.

Source: *Historic Glimpses of Asotin County* by E.V. Kuykendall, Bob Weatherley of the *Asotin County American*

Local economy

Based on the *Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages* (QCEW), in 2017 overall employment grew by 5.5 percent to 6,322, which was led by transportation and warehousing (22.7 percent), healthcare and social assistance (21.9 percent), information (12.9 percent), manufacturing (7.6 percent), finance and insurance (7.2 percent), real estate and rental and leasing (6.1 percent). A combination of growing industries for the county reflects strong economic and population growth.

Industries that have decreased over the year include wholesale trade (-18.6 percent), private educational services (-10.7 percent), arts, entertainment and recreation (-7.4 percent) and retail trade (-0.6 percent).

Agricultural employment also continues to play an oversized role, not in terms of total employment, but in terms of economic impact. High prices for wheat positively impacts wholesale sales employment, retail sales and the overall quantity of money flowing through the economy. Market value of products sold was over \$20.5 million which was up by 53 percent from the 2007 Agricultural Census. Crop sales represented 80 percent of total value of products sold. Average per farm sales were at \$110,857, which increased by 59 percent since 2007. Top crop production in Asotin County is winter wheat for grain.

Geographic facts

	Asotin County	Rank in state
Land area, 2010 (square miles)	636.21	34
People per square mile, 2010	34.0	20

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Outlook

Top-niche manufacturing continued to be a source of very positive growth for the economy. As overall economic conditions improve around the world, exports will become an area of greater strength and diversity. Some local manufacturers have made efforts to open up new Asian and European export markets for their products, especially durable goods. Manufacturing job growth has been strong with 10.7 percent five-year average annual growth. Asotin County manufacturing is dominated by durable goods manufacturing and boat building. Manufacturing is expected to continue its dominance as local companies continue to innovate and open the new markets.

Healthcare and social assistance increased 21.9 percent over the year, making it the second fastest growth industry. Average growth of 8.1 percent over the past five years was recorded in healthcare and social assistance. Segments of growth are ambulatory healthcare services and social assistance. Local population needs for healthcare services continues to grow in trend with the state and national healthcare demands. Outlook for healthcare in Asotin County is very positive and growing.

Construction and administrative and waste services jobs are also on their way to recovery. More and more activities are occurring in construction, reflecting more consumer confidence in real estate investments, as well as population demand for housing and business demand for more commercial real estate space. Five-year average annual growth

rate for construction is at 6.7 percent and makes up 7.1 percent of total employment growth. It is expected to continue in the upcoming years. Administrative and waste services increased by 6.6 percent a year for the past five years, increasing its share of total employment.

Agriculture employment is expected to continue its very slow job growth as wheat production becomes increasingly mechanized. For the region, wheat crop production was at levels considered very profitable, historically. With increased demand, decreased worldwide production stemming from droughts and higher than average per bushel prices, the local value of wheat harvest was above average. Commodities across most markets have continued to benefit from changing levels of global trade, demand and monetary valuation. It is likely these trends could stop as quickly as they started.

Labor force and unemployment

Current labor force and unemployment statistics are available on the [Labor force](#) page on ESD's labor market information website.

The total county labor force was estimated at 10,262 in 2017, about 3.0 percent more than in 2016. The labor force in the county started rebounding with 1.0 percent a year since 2012, however, 2016 marks the first year of labor force growth and expansion, and 2017 labor force growth is the strongest in two years. Unemployment was lower in 2017 by 0.7 tenths of a percent at 4.2 percent. The labor force participation rate in 2016 was 57.7 percent, down from 61.7 percent in 2010.

Source: Employment Security Department

Industry employment

Current industry employment statistics are available on the [Labor area summaries](#) page on ESD's labor market information website.

In 2017, QCEW data show Asotin County averaged 6,322 covered jobs, up by 5.5 percent from 5,992 in 2016. Of these jobs, the service-providing sector dominates with 84.2 percent of total covered employment while goods-producing industries make up only 15.8 percent.

Asotin County goods-producing industry has grown over the year with an increase of 38 jobs or 4.0 percent. Construction is continuing expansion in employment, and manufacturing is continuing in stability and growth.

- Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting continues to be a small component of total 2017 employment at 1.3 percent. Total covered payrolls were at \$1.8 million. Overall average agricultural wages in 2017 were \$21,825 for the workers.
- Construction employment continued to grow for the sixth year in a row with 18 additional jobs in 2017. Total count was 452 covered jobs, which is highest in the past nine years. Construction is the seventh largest industry in the county with 7.1 percent of employment and an average \$52,280 annual wage.

- Total employment in manufacturing increased by 7.6 percent in 2017 from 2016. At the moment, manufacturing makes up only 7.4 percent of total employment or 465 jobs. Manufacturing pays a \$41,307 average annual wage. Recent reports indicate business sales and productivity of workers are both up. Major growth occurred in transportation equipment manufacturing. This specific industry is primarily jet boat manufacturing which has national and international appeal. Boat manufacturing in the area is gaining momentum, expanding with additional exports and trade growth at the international level.
- Retail trade is the third largest industry in the county with a 16.9 percent share of total employment. Retail employment decreased over the year by 0.6 percent or 7 jobs. Five-year average annual growth rate for retail trade is at 0.2 percent, which is slower than most of the industries. Average wages in the retail sector tend to be lower than those of other industries at \$33,414 annually. Total employment in the retail trade was at 1,071 in 2017.
- Healthcare and social assistance in Asotin County is the first largest industry making up 22.8 percent of total employment in 2017. It has been and continues to be a key source of jobs for the county. The total number of jobs in healthcare and social assistance is 1,444 with an increase of 21.9 percent from the 2016 level. The healthcare and social assistance industry paid on average \$43,585 annually in 2017.
- The accommodation and food services industry has 10.1 percent of total employment with a total of 638 jobs in 2017. Total covered payrolls in Asotin County for this industry was at \$11.8 million, which is translated into \$18,419 average annual wage. Nonetheless, this is the lowest paying industry which remains an important support industry for the business community, visitors and area residents.
- Government administration makes up 18.9 percent of total employment in the area, with a total of 1,193 jobs in 2017. The majority of government employment is in local and state education and health services. Government is second largest industry segment in the county with total covered payroll of \$47.3 million, which translates in to an average annual wage of \$39,654 in 2017.

For historical industry employment data, [*contact an economist*](#).

Source: Employment Security Department

Industry employment by age and gender

The Local Employment Dynamics (LED) database, a joint project of state employment departments and the U.S. Census Bureau, matches state employment data with federal administrative data. Among the products is industry employment by age and gender. All workers covered by state unemployment insurance data are included; federal workers and non-covered workers, such as the self-employed, are not. Data are presented by place of work, not place of residence.

Asotin County highlights:

In 2017, men held 45.3 percent of the jobs in Asotin County and women held 54.7 percent.

- Workers over the age of 55 years of age held 23.7 percent of all employment, close to the state number of 22.3 percent.
- Workers between the ages of 25 and 34 held 21.8 percent of all employment, which is followed by workers 45 to 54 years of age with 19.4 percent of all employment.
- Male-dominated industries included construction (85.3 percent), manufacturing (82.7 percent), agriculture (76.0 percent), wholesale trade (74.7 percent) and transportation and warehousing (70.6 percent).
- Female-dominated industries included healthcare and social assistance (79.6 percent), professional, scientific and technical services (76.2 percent), finance and insurance (73.5 percent), education services (71.0 percent) and the real estate and rental and leasing industry (63.5 percent).

Source: The Local Employment Dynamics

Wages and income

- In 2017, employers in Asotin County paid \$240.6 million in wages, which increased by 12.4 percent from \$214.0 million in 2016.
- The average annual wage for jobs in the county increased by 6.6 percent to \$38,064 in 2017 from \$35,717 in 2016.
- The 2017 median hourly wage for Asotin County was \$18.76, below the state figure of \$24.89, and the state figure minus King County of \$22.00.
- Median household income was \$58,414 in 2016 estimates. This is much lower than the state average of \$76,507.
- Workers living in Asotin County earn a large portion of their income outside of the county. In 2016, workers earned over 55.6 percent of their total wages working outside of the county.

Personal income

Personal income includes earned income, investment income, and government transfer payments such as Social Security and veterans' benefits. Investment income includes income imputed from pension funds and from owning a home. Per capita personal income equals total personal income divided by the resident population.

- Per capita income in Asotin County was \$42,940 in 2016, which is 87.2 percent of the U.S. average (\$49,246) and 78.7 percent of the state average (\$54,579).
- Investment income was 21.0 percent of per capita total income in 2016.

- Government transfer payments, as a proportion of total income, have risen steadily from 12 percent in 1969 to 28 percent in 2016.
- The poverty rate for Asotin County in 2016 was estimated at 14.5 percent, above the states poverty rate of 12.7 percent, and below the national poverty rate of 15.1 percent.

Source: Employment Security Department; Bureau of Labor Statistics; Bureau of Economic Analysis; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey

Population

The U.S. Census estimates the population of Asotin County in 2017 was 22,535. Since 2010, the county's population has increased 4.2 percent, slower than the 10.1 percent for the state.

- Asotin County had 34.0 people per square mile in 2010. The state had 101.2 people per square mile
- The population has experienced more net in-migration than natural increases.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Population facts

	Asotin County	Washington state
Population 2017	22,535	7,405,743
Population 2010	21,623	6,724,540
Percent change, 2010 to 2017	4.2%	10.1%

Age, gender and ethnicity

- In 2017, Asotin County had 20.5 percent of its population under age 18, compared to 22.2 percent statewide.
- The population was 22.5 percent for those 65 years and over, compared with 15.1 percent statewide.
- Females were 51.3 percent of the population, compared to 50.0 percent statewide.
- Asotin County was less diverse than the state in terms of race and in 2017, 93.7 percent of residents were white and non-Latino, compared with 79.5 percent statewide.
- Hispanic or Latino residents represented 4.0 percent of the population, compared to 12.7 percent statewide.

Demographics

	Asotin County	Washington state
Population by age, 2017		
Under 5 years old	5.2%	6.2%
Under 18 years old	20.5%	22.2%
65 years and older	22.5%	15.1%
Females, 2017	51.3%	50%
Race/ethnicity, 2017		
White	93.7%	79.5%
Black	0.7%	4.2%
American Indian, Alaskan Native	1.8%	1.9%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander	1.1%	9.7%
Hispanic or Latino, any race	4%	12.7%

Educational attainment

- In the period 2012 through 2016, Asotin County residents over the age of 25 had similar high school graduation rates, 90.0 percent, compared to their statewide counterparts at 90.6 percent.
- An estimated 21.0 percent of those over 25 had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 33.6 percent statewide.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Useful links

- [County data tables](#)
- [Asotin County on ofm.wa.gov](#)
- [Asotin County on ChooseWashington.com](#)
- [Asotin County History](#)
- [U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts](#)
- [Self Sufficiency Calculator for Washington State](#)
- [Asotin County home page](#)
- [Port of Clarkston](#)
- [Economic Development in Lewis-Clark Valley](#)
- [Southeast Washington Economic Development Association](#)

Employment Security Department is an equal opportunity employer/program. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities. Language assistance services for limited English proficient individuals are available free of charge. Washington Relay Service: 711.