

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 2018 overall employment grew by 1.3 percent to 6,405, which was led by information and technology (28.6 percent), wholesale trade (23.2 percent), professional and technical services (7.3 percent), transportation and warehousing (7.4 percent), construction (7.1 percent), arts, entertainment and recreation (6.9 percent), healthcare and social assistance (5.1 percent), accommodation and food services (3.4 percent), and manufacturing (1.9 percent). Economic growth is much diversified and varies among those in goods-producing and service-providing industries. These changes are giving many indicators towards employment expansion and opportunities for the local labor force residents.

Industries that have decreased over the year include retail trade (-5.2 percent), finance and insurance (-2.0 percent), real estate and rental and leasing (-8.6 percent), administrative and waste services (-11.4 percent), private educational services (-28.0 percent), other services (-3.8 percent), agriculture (-16.9 percent) and government (-1.0 percent). Industries of decline are mostly service-providing industries.

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 all products sold was over \$12.9 million, which was down by 37.0 percent from the 2012 Agricultural Census. Crop sales represented 58.48 percent of total value of products sold, while livestock, poultry, and their products accounted for 42.0 percent of total sales. Average per farm sales were at \$62,961, which decreased by 43.2 percent since 2012. 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

Most of the growth in the county is expected to be in the service-providing industries. Some of the growing industries include healthcare, retail trade and accommodation and food services. Manufacturing job growth has been strong with 8.7 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 new markets for its products.

Healthcare and social assistance recorded an average growth of 9.5 percent over the past five years. 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.

As we move forward, we can see growth in the construction industry as population outgrows current housing inventory and looks for other options in the housing market. Five-year average annual growth rate for construction is at 6.4 percent and makes up 7.5 percent of total employment.

Agriculture employment in the county is expected to continue a slowdown as wheat production becomes increasingly mechanized. For the region, wheat crop production was at levels considered very profitable, historically. Commodities across most markets have continued to see impacts and, in few cases, benefit from changing levels of global trade, demand and monetary valuation.

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 10,153 in 2018, about 0.7 percent more than in 2017. The labor force in the county started slowly rebounding in 2012. 2016 marks the first year of labor force growth above 9,900. Unemployment in 2018 was at 4.4 percent. The labor force participation rate in 2017 was 57.8 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 2018, QCEW data show Asotin County averaged 6,405 covered jobs, up by 1.3 percent from 6,324 in 2017. Of these jobs, the service-providing sector dominates with 84.0 percent of total covered employment while goods-producing industries make up only 16.0 percent.

Asotin County goods-producing industry has grown over the year with an increase of 27 jobs or 2.6 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 2018 employment at 1.1 percent. Total covered payrolls were at \$1.6 million. Overall average agricultural wages in 2018 were \$23,921 for the workers. Agricultural employment in Asotin County is the lowest since 2002, with only 69 jobs.
- Construction employment continued to grow for the seventh year in a row with 32 additional jobs in 2018. The total count was 483 covered jobs, which is the highest in the past nine years, with recovery still on the horizon from 2009 recession job loss. Construction is the fifth largest industry in the county with 7.5 percent of employment and an average \$52,500 annual wage.

- Total employment in manufacturing increased by 1.9 percent in 2018 from 2017. Manufacturing makes up only 7.4 percent of total employment or 474 jobs. Manufacturing pays a \$43,337 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 15.8 percent share of total employment. Retail employment decreased over the year by 5.2 percent or 56 jobs. Average wages in the retail sector tend to be lower than those of other industries at \$34,343 annually. Total employment in the retail trade was at 1,015 in 2018.
- Healthcare and social assistance in Asotin County is the largest industry making up 23.7 percent of total employment in 2018. 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 1,519 with an increase of 5.2 percent from the 2017 level. The healthcare and social assistance industry paid on average \$44,800 annually in 2018.
- The accommodation and food services industry have 10.3 percent of total employment with a total of 660 jobs in 2018. Total covered payrolls in Asotin County for this industry was at \$12.4 million, which is translated into \$18,816 average annual wage. Even as it is the lowest paying industry in the county, this industry remains an important support industry for the business community, visitors and area residents.
- Government administration makes up 18.4 percent of total employment in the area, with a total of 1,181 jobs in 2018. The majority of government employment is in local and state education and health services. Government is the second largest industry segment in the county with total covered payroll of \$50.3 million, which translates in to an average annual wage of \$42,531 in 2018.

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 2018, men held 45.1 percent of the jobs in Asotin County and women held 54.9 percent.

- Workers over the age of 55 held 24.3 percent of all employment, close to the state number of 22.3 percent.
- Workers between the ages of 25 and 34 held 21.1 percent of all employment, which is followed by workers 45 to 54 years of age with 20.2 percent of all employment.
- Male-dominated industries included construction (85.7 percent), manufacturing (81.2 percent), agriculture (78.7 percent), wholesale trade (66.2 percent) and transportation and warehousing (76.9 percent).
- Female-dominated industries included healthcare and social assistance (79.4 percent), professional, scientific and technical services (77.2 percent), finance and insurance (75.3 percent), education services (71.0 percent) and the real estate and rental and leasing industry (62.4 percent).

Source: The Local Employment Dynamics

Wages and income

- In 2018, employers in Asotin County paid \$255.9 million in wages, which increased by 6.3 percent from \$240.7 million in 2017.
- The average annual wage for jobs in the county increased by 5.0 percent to \$39,980 in 2018 from \$38,062 in 2017.
- The 2018 median hourly wage for Asotin County was \$19.72, below the state figure of \$25.98, and the state figure minus King County of \$22.37.
- Median household income was \$47,483 in 2017 estimates. This is much lower than the state average of \$62,980.
- Workers living in Asotin County earn a large portion of their income outside of the county. In 2017, workers earned over 54.1 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 \$44,848 in 2017, which is 86.8 percent of the U.S. average (\$51,640) and 77.4 percent of Washington's average (\$57,896).
- Investment income was 22.0 percent of per capita total income in 2017.
- Government transfer payments, as a proportion of total income, have risen steadily from 12 percent in 1969 to 27 percent in 2017.

- The poverty rate for Asotin County in 2017 was estimated at 13.5 percent, above the states poverty rate of 12.2 percent, and below the national poverty rate of 14.6 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 2018 was 22,610. Since 2010, the county’s population has increased 4.6 percent, slower than the 12.1 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 QuickFacts

Population facts

	Asotin County	Washington state
Population 2018	22,610	7,535,591
Population 2010	21,623	6,724,540
Percent change, 2010 to 2018	4.6%	12.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Age, gender and ethnicity

- In 2018, Asotin County had 20.3 percent of its population under age 18, compared to 22.1 percent statewide.
- The population for those 65 years and over was 23.3 percent, compared with 15.4 percent statewide.
- Females were 51.2 percent of the population, compared to 50.0 percent statewide.
- Asotin County was less diverse than the state in terms of race and in 2018, 93.2 percent of residents were white and non-Latino, compared with 78.9 percent statewide.
- Hispanic or Latino residents represented 4.2 percent of the population, compared to 12.9 percent statewide.

Demographics

	Asotin County	Washington state
Population by age, 2018		
Under 5 years old	5.2%	6.1%
Under 18 years old	20.3%	22.1%
65 years and older	23.3%	15.4%
Females, 2018	51.2%	50.0%
Race/ethnicity, 2018		
White	93.2%	78.9%
Black	0.8%	4.3%
American Indian, Alaskan Native	1.8%	1.9%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander	1.2%	10.1%
Hispanic or Latino, any race	4.2%	12.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Educational attainment

- In the period 2013 through 2017, Asotin County residents over the age of 25 had high school graduation rates of 89.9 percent, similar to their statewide counterparts at 90.8 percent.
- An estimated 21.4 percent of those over 25 had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 34.5 percent statewide.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Useful links

- [County data tables](#)
- [Census Bureau Profile](#)
- [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.