

# 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 2019 overall employment grew by 0.5 percent to 6,436, which was led by construction (with 41 new jobs), healthcare and social assistance (with 41 new jobs), retail trade grew by 25 new jobs, mostly coming from general merchandise stores. Also, other industries that added employment includes accommodation and food services (20 new jobs), arts, entertainment and recreation (10 new jobs), transportation and warehousing (six new jobs) and wholesale trade with four new jobs.

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 resident labor force.

All the other industries have recorded decreases or remained unchanged over the year. The largest employment loss was in professional and technical services with 47 fewer jobs. Other industries that have decreased over the year include manufacturing (34 jobs), other services (11 jobs), information (10 jobs), administrative and waste services (seven jobs), finance and insurance (five jobs), government (three jobs), and real estate, rental and leasing (two jobs). Industries of decline are widespread with vary noticeable decreases in professional and technical services. Agriculture, mining and utilities remained unchanged over the year, or these are industries with limited information available.

Agricultural employment also continues to play an oversized role in regard to the overall contribution to the county’s economic well-being beyond covered employment. High prices for wheat positively impact 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 \$62,961, which decreased by 43.2 percent since 2012. Top crop production in Asotin County is winter wheat for grain.

Source: Employment Security Department; Asotin County data tables

## 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.

Construction activities have been strong in the county. Asotin County construction dominated in growth with 41 new jobs, or an increase of 8.5 percent. This industry is expanding within the specialty trade segment, to accommodate demand for new housing and remodeling in the areas with higher population concentrations.

Healthcare and social assistance recorded an average growth of 2.7 percent over the year with 41 new jobs. Segments of growth are social assistance and nursing and residential care facilities. 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.

Healthcare and social assistance makes up over 24.2 percent of total employment in the county with average annual growth of 7.1 percent over the past five years.

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. The five-year average annual growth rate for construction is at 7.2 percent and makes up 8.2 percent of total covered employment.

Accommodation and food services is yet another industry to keep an eye on for the next couple of years, as the area expands within food service offerings for the local and regional resident population. Average annual growth rate for this industry has been 1.2 percent a year for the past five years with 10.6 percent share of the 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 10,400 in 2019, about 2.1 percent more than in 2018. 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 2019 was 4.1 percent. The labor force participation rate in 2018 was 56.5 percent, down from 57.8 in 2017 and down from 61.7 percent in 2010. The number of employed residents increased by 2.4 percent over the year, or 230 more resident job holders, while the number of unemployed decreased in 2019 by 19 or 4.2 percent.

Source: Employment Security Department; Asotin County data tables

## Industry employment

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

In 2019, QCEW data show Asotin County averaged 6,436 covered jobs, up by 0.5 percent from 6,407 in 2018. Of these jobs, the service-providing sector dominated with 83.9 percent of total covered employment while goods-producing industries make up only 16.1 percent.

Asotin County goods-producing industries have grown over the year with an increase of seven jobs or 0.7 percent. Construction is continuing expansion in employment, while manufacturing and agriculture are seeing some structural changes in employment with decreases and restructuring.

- Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting continued to be a small component of total 2019 employment at 1.1 percent. Total covered payrolls were \$1.6 million. Overall average agricultural wages in 2019 were \$22,490 for the workers. Agricultural employment in Asotin County is the lowest since 2002, with only 69 jobs.
- Construction employment continued to grow for the eighth year in a row with 41 additional jobs in 2019. The total count was 525 covered jobs, which is the highest in the past ten years. This is the first year since 2007 to have construction employment above 500 jobs and is a pre-Great Recession high. Construction is the fifth-largest industry in the county with 8.2 percent of employment and an average \$56,171 annual wage.
- Manufacturing decreased by 7.2 percent in 2019 from 2018, for a total employment of 34 jobs. Manufacturing makes up only 6.8 percent of total employment or 440 jobs. Manufacturing pays a \$44,772 average annual wage. Major loss of jobs occurred in transportation equipment manufacturing, while furniture and related products manufacturing increased by 7.7 percent. The transportation-specific industry is primarily jet boat manufacturing which has national and international appeal. In the last year, durable goods manufacturing has seen significant structural changes in the workforce and demand. Other manufacturing in the area is picking up, but at much slower pace.

- Retail trade is the third-largest industry in the county with a 16.2 percent share of total employment. Retail employment increased over the year by 2.5 percent or 25 jobs. Average wages in the retail sector tend to be lower than those of other industries at \$36,013 annually. Total employment in the retail trade was 1,040 in 2019. The largest expansion in retail trade had been in general merchandise stores, which makes up 54.2 percent of total retail trade employment.
- Healthcare and social assistance in Asotin County is the largest industry that made up 24.2 percent of total employment in 2019. 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 1,560 with an increase of 2.7 percent, or 41 jobs from the 2018 level. The healthcare and social assistance industry paid on average \$45,145 annually in 2019. The largest expansion came from social assistance segments with 26 new jobs.
- The accommodation and food services industry had 10.6 percent of total employment with a total of 680 jobs in 2019. Total covered payrolls in Asotin County for this industry was \$13.1 million, which is translated to a \$19,286 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 18.3 percent of total employment in the area, with a total of 1,178 jobs in 2019. Government employment decreased by 0.3 percent from 2018, mainly in state government. Most of the government employment is in local and state education and health services. Government is the second-largest industry segment in the county with a total covered payroll of \$52.9 million, which translates to an average annual wage of \$44,935 in 2019.

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

Source: Employment Security Department; Asotin County data tables

### *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 2019, men held 45.3 percent of the jobs in Asotin County and women held 54.7 percent.

- Workers over the age of 55 held 24.5 percent of all employment, close to the state number of 22.8 percent.
- Workers between the ages of 25 and 34 held 21.7 percent of all employment, which is followed by workers 45 to 54 years of age with 18.8 percent of all employment.
- Male-dominated industries included construction (84.9 percent), manufacturing (80.3 percent), transportation and warehousing (73.6 percent), agriculture (69.7 percent), and wholesale trade (67.6 percent).

- Female-dominated industries included healthcare and social assistance (79.4 percent), finance and insurance (74.9 percent), education services (71.2 percent), professional, scientific and technical services (64.9 percent), and the other services (61.5 percent).

Source: Employment Security Department; Asotin County data tables

## Wages and income

- In 2019, employers in Asotin County paid \$266.1 million in wages, which increased by 3.8 percent from \$256.2 million in 2018.
- The average annual wage for jobs in the county increased by 3.4 percent to \$41,329 in 2019 from \$39,980 in 2018.
- 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 \$53,715 in 2019 estimates. This is much lower than the state average of \$73,775.
- Workers living in Asotin County earn a large portion of their income outside of the county. In 2018, workers earned over 53.0 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 \$48,456 in 2019, which is 85.8 percent of the U.S. average (\$56,490) and 74.8 percent of Washington's average (\$64,758).
- Investment income was 23.2 percent of per capita total income in 2019.
- Government transfer payments, as a proportion of total income, have risen steadily from 12 percent in 1969 to 28 percent in 2019.
- The poverty rate for Asotin County in 2019 was estimated at 12.6 percent, above the states poverty rate of 10.8 percent, and below the national poverty rate of 13.4 percent.

Source: Employment Security Department; Asotin County data tables

## Population

The U.S. Census estimates the population of Asotin County in 2019 was 22,582. Since 2010, the county's population has increased 4.4 percent, slower than the 13.2 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 2019	22,582	7,614,893
Population 2010	21,623	6,724,540
Percent change, 2010 to 2019	4.4%	13.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

### Age, gender and ethnicity

- In 2019, Asotin County had 20.0 percent of its population under age 18, compared to 21.8 percent statewide.
- The population for those 65 years and over was 24.0 percent, compared with 15.9 percent statewide.
- Females were 51.1 percent of the population, compared to 49.9 percent statewide.
- Asotin County was less diverse than the state in terms of race and in 2019, 93.2 percent of residents were white and non-Latino, compared with 78.5 percent statewide.
- Hispanic or Latino residents represented 4.4 percent of the population, compared to 13.0 percent statewide.

### Demographics

	Asotin County	Washington state
<b>Population by age, 2019</b>		
Under 5 years old	5.1%	6.0%
Under 18 years old	20.0%	21.8%
65 years and older	24.0%	15.9%
<b>Females,</b>	<b>51.1%</b>	<b>49.9%</b>
<b>Race/ethnicity, 2019</b>		
White	93.2%	78.5%
Black	0.8%	4.4%
American Indian, Alaskan Native	1.8%	1.9%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander	1.3%	10.4%
Hispanic or Latino, any race	4.4%	13.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

### Educational attainment

- In 2019, Asotin County residents over the age of 25 had high school graduation rates of 91.4 percent, similar to their statewide counterparts at 91.3 percent.
- An estimated 21.4 percent of those over 25 had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 36.0 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.