

Grant County Profile

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Overview

Regional context

In 1902, Grant County was carved out of Douglas County as its own county. Grant County is the fourth largest county in the state in terms of land area, but is sparsely populated. It is located toward the central-eastern edge of the state in the Columbia Basin. On the north end of the county is the Grand Coulee Dam, which is the largest electric power-producing facility in the United States and one of the largest concrete structures in the world.

Grant County is relatively flat, making it ideal for raising livestock on its dry grassland, which was the primary draw for white settlers in the mid-1880s. The coming of the railroad helped move more settlers into farming as it provided a means to get products to market. The semi-arid climate created a challenge for farming, with most farmers locating near water sources.

Local economy

In years past, Grant County's economy was heavily concentrated in ranching and agriculture. Many of the county's early residents were sheep and cattle ranchers. The transition to fruit and crop farming as the dominant industries resulted from the development of adequate irrigation capacity starting in the 1930s. Today, agriculture still plays a large role in the local economy. Irrigated farming of a variety of crops and the associated food processing industry comprise a large part of the nondurable-goods manufacturing sector. In 2018 for example, food processing (NAICS 311) provided 44.0 percent of the 4,787 manufacturing jobs in Grant County. Employers in this sector manufacture frozen fruits and vegetables, as well as frozen specialty foods and canned fruits.

Grant County food processors know and trust the quality and variety of locally grown crops including potatoes, apples, wheat, barley, carrots, corn, onions, peaches, cherries, mint, beans, etc. According to the Grant County Economic Development Council, the county's 1,858 farms annually produce crops and livestock valued at \$1.19 billion. Crops processed here in Grant County make food processing a \$364 million industry, which still has plenty of room to grow. Access to Interstate 90 and the Burlington-Northern Santa Fe Mainline make it easy to transport goods by truck or rail to major metro centers such as Seattle, Portland and Chicago.

Although agriculture and industries dependent on agriculture are still key players in the Grant County economy, there has been considerable diversification into other sectors. The area's low-cost electricity; availability of air, rail, and highway transportation networks; abundance of reasonably

priced land; and a high-speed fiber optic network have made Grant County attractive to software and manufacturing firms. For example, the following is a summary of the air, rail, and highway transportation networks available in Grant County:

- **Grant County International Airport** – This airport boasts one of the largest airfields in the United States and accepts some of the largest aircraft in the world. The airport is a facility favored by military and commercial flight test programs and has the capacity to accommodate much more given its five runways and onsite FAA control tower for commercial, military, and general aviation use.
- **Rail** – Rail needs are served by both The Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) and the Columbia Basin Railroad (CBRR). The mainline of the BNSF has connections to the Chicago area from Quincy in as little as 48 hours; to and from times of departure. New rail is arriving at the Port of Moses Lake via the CBRR where Foreign Trade Zone #203 supports numerous manufacturers.
- **Highways** – Running right through the center of Grant County, Interstate 90 is the longest interstate highway in the United States. It connects Grant County to the deep seaports in Seattle and Tacoma to the west, and to Chicago and Boston to the east. U.S. Highway 2 is the other major east/west transportation route in Grant County. It spans over 2,500 miles and connects Grant County to Everett, WA on the west and to St. Ignace, MI on the east. State Highway 17 is the main north/south transportation route.

Geographic facts

	Grant County	Washington state
Land area, 2010 (square miles)	2,679.51	66,455.52
People per square mile, 2010	33.3	101.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Outlook

The Grant County nonfarm economy was on a recovery path since the depressed economic years of 2009 and 2010. During the next eight years from 2011 through 2018 inclusive, average annual nonfarm job growth has ranged from lows of 0.7 percent in 2012 and 2017 to a high of 4.8 percent in 2018. However, total nonfarm employment growth was lethargic in the first half of 2019, and employment generally retrenched year over year in the second half of 2019. In fact, preliminary estimates indicate that total nonfarm employment in Grant County slipped from 30,770 jobs in 2018 to 30,610 in 2019, a 160 job and 0.5 percent downturn.

Long-term nonfarm employment projections (ten-year data) produced by the Employment Security Department (ESD) forecast a 1.3 percent average annual growth rate from 2017 to 2027 for the five-county (Adams, Chelan, Douglas, Grant and Okanogan) North Central workforce development area (WDA). Washington state average annual growth rate is projected to be 1.5 percent.

Labor force and unemployment

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

During the recent recession, the average annual not seasonally adjusted unemployment rate in Grant County rose to an apex of 10.9 percent in 2010. The unemployment rate then fell for eight consecutive years from 2011 to 2018 inclusive, to 6.2 percent in 2018. This 6.2 percent reading in 2018 is the lowest average annual unemployment rate in Grant County since electronic records were implemented by ESD in 1990 – encouraging news for the local economy.

Grant County's CLF expanded by 1,329 residents (a 2.9 percent increase) from 2017 to 2018. Recently, between November 2018 and November 2019, the labor force advanced by 2.0 percent (up by 906 residents). Less encouraging was the fact that during this timeframe the number of unemployed jumped by 20.8 percent with 551 more Grant County residents out of work. Hence, the November 2019 unemployment rate of 6.9 percent rose one and one-tenth points over the 5.8 percent reading in November 2018.

Washington's CLF grew by 74,195 residents (a 2.0 percent upturn) from 2017 to 2018. The state's labor force has expanded year over year for the past 70 months (February 2014 through November 2019). In November 2019, Washington's CLF tallied 3,971,745 residents versus 3,828,288 in November 2018, equating to 143,457 more Washingtonians in the CLF (up 3.7 percent).

Source: Employment Security Department

Industry employment

The analysis in the first part of this section is derived primarily from Quarterly Benchmarked (WA-QB) data. One advantage of these data is that the employment information is very current, and data are updated monthly using WA-QB employment estimates. However, estimates are nonfarm related (they do not include agricultural employment figures).

The analysis in the second part of this section is derived from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Quarterly Census of Employment and Wage (QCEW) program, conducted by ESD. Although it takes a little longer to acquire QCEW data (than WA-QB data), the economic information provided is broader and more detailed than that provided by WA-QB.

First, QCEW includes employment, wage and size of firm figures for the agricultural sector, which WA-QB does not include. Second, QCEW data provides employment, wage and size of firm figures for businesses and government organizations in Grant County down to the 3-digit NAICS sub-sector level (more detail than WA-QB). QCEW data include agricultural and nonagricultural employment and wages for firms, organizations and individuals whose employees are covered by the Washington State Employment Security Act. Also included are data for federal government agencies covered by Title 5, U.S.C. 85. Covered employment generally exceeds 85 percent of total employment in the state of Washington.

Types of jobs not covered under the unemployment compensation system, and hence not included in QCEW data, include casual laborers not performing duties in the course of the employer's trade or business; railroad personnel; newspaper delivery people; insurance or real estate agents paid on a commission basis only; non-covered employees working for parochial schools, religious or non-profit organizations; employees of sheltered workshops; inmates working in penal institutions; and non-covered corporate officers, etc.

Analysis using Quarterly Benchmarked data:

The National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) announced that the national recession occurred from December 2007 through June 2009. The effects of this recession hit the Grant County economy lightly in 2008 (down 0.2 percent), hard in 2009 (down 3.7 percent) and then lightly in 2010 (down 0.3 percent), in terms of losses in total nonfarm employment. The number of nonfarm jobs across Grant County stood at a pre-recession peak of 27,610 jobs in 2007, and it took seven years (until 2014 when employment averaged 28,650) for the local economy to regain and surpass this figure. The good economic news is that from 2011 through 2018 inclusive, Grant County's nonfarm market has been expanding. The following is a brief synopsis of average annual local nonfarm employment trends for the past three of these years:

- In 2016 – Grant County's economy provided 240 new nonfarm jobs, an average annual increase of 0.8 percent, slightly less robust than the growth rate in 2015 (1.0 percent) and considerably less robust than the state's 3.1 percent job growth rate. Although Grant County's nondurable goods manufacturers (primarily food processors) grew by 110 jobs, retail trade stores netted 120 more jobs, and state and local education rebounded by adding 110 jobs. Durable goods manufacturers lost 320 jobs (down 13.7 percent), falling from an average of 2,340 jobs countywide in 2015 to 2,020 in 2016.
- In 2017 – Grant County's economy provided 190 new nonfarm jobs, a modest average annual increase of 0.7 percent, a tad less robust than the local job growth rate in 2016, and considerably less robust than the state's 2.4 percent job growth rate. Industries that fared well in 2017 were professional and business services (up 170 jobs), state and local government education (up 120 jobs) and construction (up 100 jobs). Conversely, wholesale trade tallied 280 fewer jobs, primarily due to a non-economic event (a NAICS code change).
- In 2018 – This was an excellent year for the Grant County economy. Nonfarm employment averaged 30,770, a 1,400 job and 4.8 percent upturn above the 29,370 jobs tallied in 2017. Nonfarm growth was particularly strong in professional and business services (up 600 jobs), information and financial activities (up 290 jobs), construction (up 180 jobs), and state and local government education (up 140 jobs). On the downside, durable goods manufacturing lost 150 jobs countywide. Statewide, the nonfarm labor market had a good year with nonfarm employment rising by 2.5 percent, not quite as robust as the 4.8 percent job growth pace in Grant County.

Referring to the most current monthly WA-QB data (as of November 2019), it is noted however that the growth in Grant County's nonfarm job market was lethargic in the first half of 2019. In fact, estimates indicate that employment has retrenched, year over year, for the past five months (July through November 2019). Between November 2018 and November 2019, employment slipped by 0.5 percent, from 31,040 jobs to 30,890.

How does the state's economy stack up? Relatively, Washington's nonfarm labor market looks much stronger in 2019 than Grant County's labor market. Most recently, in November 2019, business and government organizations across Washington supplied 3,511,300 nonfarm jobs (not seasonally adjusted), compared to 3,444,700 jobs in November 2018, a 1.9 percent year over year employment increase. The state's economy has posted year over year nonfarm employment increases for the past 110 consecutive months (October 2010 through November 2019).

Analysis using QCEW data:

The North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) is an industry classification system that groups businesses/organizations into categories or sectors based on the activities in which they are primarily engaged. There are 19 private sectors and three government sectors (for a total of 22 sectors) at the 2-digit NAICS code level, within each county-level economy. One can observe much about the structure of a county's economy by quantifying and comparing the number of jobs and the percentage of jobs in these sectors by using annual average QCEW data. The most current average annual employment data available for Grant County are for 2018, and these data show:

The top five Grant County industry sectors in 2018 in terms of employment were:

Sector	Number of jobs	Share of employment
1. Agriculture, forestry and fishing	10,008	24.8%
2. Local government	6,888	17.1%
3. Manufacturing	4,787	11.9%
4. Retail trade	3,443	8.5%
5. Health Services	2,747	6.8%
All other industries	12,477	30.9%
Total covered payrolls	40,350	100%

More than 70 percent (69.1 percent, to be exact) of all jobs in Grant County were in five, two-digit NAICS industries or sectors (agriculture, local government, manufacturing, retail trade and health services). The following is a comparison of the top five sectors that provided the most jobs in Grant County in 2017 with the sectors that produced the highest payrolls:

- Agriculture was the top job-providing industry (10,008 jobs) in Grant County in 2018, netting 24.8 percent of all jobs countywide, yet tallying only 17.3 percent (\$295.0 million) of total wage income (\$1.701 billion). Why? Many agricultural jobs are seasonal.
- Local government provided 17.1 percent (6,888 jobs) of total covered employment (40,350 jobs) yet accounted for 22.0 percent (\$374.5 million) of total wage income – indicating that this is a relatively “good paying” industry in Grant County. Jobs with public school districts (primary and secondary schools), public utility districts, police and fire departments, public hospitals and clinics, ports, etc., are tallied under the local government category.
- Manufacturing provided 11.9 percent of covered jobs in Grant County in 2018 but accounted for 15.5 percent of covered wages. In 2018, the average annual wage in manufacturing in Grant County was \$54,976, which was 130.3 percent of the average covered wage of \$42,180. Incidentally, within the local manufacturing sector in 2018, the food manufacturing subsector (NAICS 311) provided 44.0 percent of all manufacturing jobs – emphasizing the importance of agriculture on local manufacturing operations.
- Retail trade stores provided 3,443 part- and full-time jobs in 2018, accounting for 8.5 percent of total covered employment in Grant County but tallied only 6.1 percent of total covered wages/payroll.
- Private health services tallied 6.8 percent of total covered employment and 6.5 percent of total wage income.

If one were to analyze employment changes in Grant County from the past 10-year period (2008 through 2018, eleven years inclusively) incorporating Washington State Employment Security Department's average annual QCEW data for 2018, it is noted that:

- Total covered employment increased from 35,038 in 2008 to 40,350 in 2018, a 5,312 job and 15.2 percent upturn – an annualized growth rate of 1.4 percent. The number of agricultural jobs (a subset of total covered employment) expanded from 8,434 in 2008 to 10,008 in 2018, a 1,574 job and 18.7 percent uptrend – an annualized growth rate of 1.7 percent. In 2008, Grant County's agricultural industry accounted for 24.1 percent of total covered employment and in 2018, it accounted for 24.8 percent of total covered employment. However, agricultural employment as a percentage of total covered employment has slipped a bit during the past four years from 27.4 percent in 2014 to 24.8 percent in 2018. Nevertheless, during the recent 10-year period (2008 to 2018), the agricultural share of employment in Grant County rose by a modest seven-tenths percentage point, 24.1 percent (in 2008) to 24.8 percent (in 2018).
- Total covered wages rose from \$1.120 billion in 2008 to \$1.701 billion in 2018, a \$581.8 million and 52.0 percent upturn – an annualized growth rate of 4.3 percent. The agricultural payroll (a subset of total covered wages) advanced from \$181.5 million in 2008 to \$295.0 million in 2018, a \$113.6 million and 62.6 percent uptrend – an annualized growth rate of 5.0 percent. In 2008, Grant County's agricultural industry accounted for 16.2 percent of total covered wages, and by 2018, agricultural wages accounted for 17.3 percent of total covered payroll. Hence, agricultural share of wages rose one and one-tenth percentage points from 16.2 to 17.3 percent in Grant County during this 10-year period. Hence, one could generalize that within this 10-year period, from both employment and wage perspectives, the footprint made by agriculture on Grant County's economy has grown a bit larger.

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.

Grant County highlights:

In 2018, the largest job holder age group was the 55+ year-olds who accounted for 24.7 percent of all job holders in Grant County. The group in second place was the 35 to 44-year-olds filling 21.3 percent of all jobs. In third place was the 25 to 34-year-olds with 20.7 percent of all local jobs.

Males held 54.5 percent of all jobs and females held 45.5 percent of all jobs countywide in 2018.

- Male-dominated industries included mining (89.5 percent), construction (82.5 percent) and transportation and warehousing (77.4 percent).
- Female-dominated industries included healthcare and social assistance (80.8 percent), educational services (72.4 percent) and finance and insurance (69.4 percent).

Source: The Local Employment Dynamics

Wages and income

The total covered payroll in 2018 in Grant County was approximately \$1.701 billion. The average annual wage was \$42,180 or 63.8 percent of the state average of \$66,156.

The top five Grant County industries in 2018 in terms of payrolls were:

Sector	Payroll	Share of payrolls
1. Local government	\$374,462,093	22.0%
2. Agriculture, forestry and fishing	\$295,001,379	17.3%
3. Manufacturing	\$263,318,708	15.5%
4. Health services	\$110,441,760	6.5%
5. Retail trade	\$103,893,499	6.1%
All other industries	\$554,305,636	32.6%
Total covered payrolls	\$1,701,423,075	100%

As shown in the table above, QCEW data showed that Grant County's workers received a little over \$1.701 billion in wages in 2018. Over two-thirds of this wage income (specifically, 67.4 percent) was earned in five, two-digit NAICS industries or sectors (local government, agriculture, manufacturing, private health services, and retail trade). Local government was the largest provider of wage income/payroll in the county in 2018, supplying 22.0 percent of total earned wage income and accounting for 17.1 percent total covered employment (see "Industry employment" section). Agriculture, forestry and fishing ranked second in 2018 in terms of share of total covered payroll, providing 17.3 percent of all wages earned in Grant County – with the lion's share of these wages being earned in the agricultural industry (versus forestry and fishing).

Average annual covered wages in Grant County during 2018 were highest in information (\$103,507), management of companies and enterprises (\$103,265), and government (\$57,001). Conversely, average annual wages were lowest in accommodation and food services (\$18,272), private educational services (\$19,587) and administrative and waste services (\$22,734).

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

Personal income

Personal income includes earned income, investment income, and government 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.

In 2018, Grant County inflation-adjusted per capita personal income was \$39,789, less than the state (\$62,026) and the nation (\$54,446).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts, the median household income in Grant County was \$54,982 in the period 2014 through 2018. The county's median was less than the state (\$70,116) and the nation (\$60,293).

In the period 2014 through 2018, 12.7 percent of the county's population was living below the poverty level, higher than the state at 10.3 percent and the nation at 11.8 percent, according to the U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts. The state and national rates are not directly comparable to the county rate because they each use different data sources.

Population

Grant County's population in 2018 was 97,331. The population grew 9.2 percent from April 1, 2010 through July 1, 2018, slower than the state's 12.1 percent growth rate during this timeframe.

Moses Lake is the largest city in the county with an estimated population in 2018 of 23,660 residents. Ephrata is the next largest city with 8,130 residents.

Population facts

	Grant County	Washington state
Population 2018	97,331	7,535,591
Population 2010	89,124	6,724,540
Percent change, 2010 to 2018	9.2%	12.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Age, gender and ethnicity

Individuals under 18 years of age comprise 29.4 percent of Grant County's population, which is greater than the 22.1 percent proportion across Washington state as of July 2018. People under 5 years of age comprised 7.7 percent of the county population compared to 6.1 percent for the state.

Females made up 49.1 percent of the population compared to 50.0 percent in the state.

Hispanics or Latinos made up 42.1 percent of the local population, considerably higher than the 12.9 percent figure statewide.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Demographics

	Grant County	Washington state
Population by age, 2018		
Under 5 years old	7.7%	6.1%
Under 18 years old	29.4%	22.1%
65 years and older	13.7%	15.4%
Females, 2018	49.1%	50%
Race/ethnicity, 2018		
White alone	92.2%	78.9%
Black alone	1.8%	4.3%
American Indian, Alaskan Native	2.3%	1.9%
Asian	1.1%	9.3%
Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander	0.2%	0.8%
Two or more races	2.4%	4.8%
Hispanic or Latino, any race	42.1%	12.9%
White along – Not Hispanic or Latino	53.4%	68.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Educational attainment

According to the American Community Survey (ACS), during the period 2014 through 2018, 76.1 percent of Grant County's adults age 25 and older graduated from high school versus Washington's 91.0 percent and 87.7 percent across the nation.

Only 17.6 percent of county residents age 25 and older hold a bachelor's degree or higher compared with 35.3 percent in Washington state and 31.5 percent nationwide.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Useful links

- [County data tables](#)
- [Census Bureau Profile](#)
- [Grant County Economic Development Council](#)
- [Grant County home page](#)
- [Grant County on ChooseWashington.com](#)
- [Grant County on ofm.wa.gov](#)
- [Grant County History](#)
- [Grant County Trends](#)
- [Self Sufficiency Calculator for Washington State](#)
- [Census Bureau QuickFacts](#)
- [Port of Ephrata](#)
- [Port of Mattawa](#)
- [Port of Moses Lake](#)
- [Port of Quincy](#)
- [Port of Royal Slope](#)
- [Washington Ports](#)
- [Workforce Development Areas and WorkSource Office Directory](#)

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.