

Walla Walla County Profile

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Overview

Regional context

Walla Walla County was formed in 1854 and was named after the Walla Walla tribe of Native Americans. Walla Walla covers 1,271 square miles of land, ranking 26th in size among Washington's 39 counties. Located in southeastern Washington, it is bordered by Columbia to the east, Franklin to the northwest, Benton on the west and Umatilla County, Oregon on the south. Walla Walla County has a population density of 46.3 persons per square mile and is home to one of the oldest communities in the state.

Walla Walla's agricultural industry is the backbone of its economic vitality. Wheat, onions, potatoes and wine grapes are some of crops that are grown in Walla Walla County. In the past few years, Walla Walla has become one of the main attractions for wine and arts tourism as the area gets national and world recognition for its quality wine.

Local economy

The Cayuse, Walla Walla and Umatilla tribes were well established at the eastern end of the Columbia River basin. With abilities to travel the surrounding area for trading, some of the tribes acquired horses, which they later used for breeding or for sale or trade. Later, trading became one of the primary economic activities as fur and goods trading companies moved into the area with the pioneers. As pioneers started settling in the area, agricultural and ranching activities prospered as demand for produce and meats grew with a new influx of gold rush pioneers.

Walla Walla County went through many changes in the late 1800's, however it has cultivated a flourishing community which is home to the first and oldest college, bank and newspaper in the state. Walla Walla County was added to the railroad grid with a 30-mile line connection in 1875, as the need for local agricultural products increased with the creation of new settlements in the west. Also, in 1887, Walla Walla became home to one of the first territorial prisons in the state, where government became a major employing industry in the area.

Considering its size and isolation, the Walla Walla economy has a diverse industrial makeup. The five largest sectors are: agriculture, healthcare, manufacturing, retail trade and government (educational) services, which make up over 71 percent of total employment. Walla Walla County has also become a tourist attraction and destination as people are attracted to the mild climate, low cost of living and high quality of life.

With over 181 wineries located in the valley, Walla Walla County has become a wine destination and important viticulture area. Tourism will continue to drive growth in food, accommodations and wine sales. Local agriculture is the fourth largest industry in the area and it is growing about 0.9 percent a year, with very strong tree fruit production and dry land crops.

Geographic facts

	Walla Walla County	Rank in state
Land area, 2010 (square miles)	1,270.1	26
People per square mile, 2010	46.3	17

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Outlook

Walla Walla County covered employment increased by 1.3 percent on average per year since 2015. Growth recovered in 2018 compared to a 0.2 percent decline in 2017. However, this post-recession employment growth is moving along at a slower rate than seen in the state, with expansion in only a few industries and some decreases in others.

Industries that have maintained stability in Walla Walla County for the past five years include: construction, manufacturing, transportation and warehousing, private educational services, healthcare and social assistance, arts and entertainment, accommodation and food services and government healthcare and educational services. For the next five years, industries that are expected to drive growth in the county are construction, manufacturing, agriculture, warehousing, real estate and arts, entertainment, and recreation. Walla Walla County, as part of the Eastern Washington workforce development area, is expected to grow 1.0 percent a year through 2022 and 0.7 percent a year from 2022 to 2027.

Labor force and unemployment

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

The Walla Walla County labor force was estimated at 29,270 in 2018, which is about 1.6 percent more than in 2017. Resident employment increased by 1.8 percent over the year. The number of people who are unemployed and looking for work totaled at 1,383 with a decrease over the year of about 2.8 percent. The Walla Walla County unemployment rate was 4.7 percent in 2018, which was 0.2 percent less than in 2017.

During the past 10 years, the average annual unemployment rate peaked in 2010 and 2011 at 8.0 percent and hit a low in 2008 of 5.2 percent. In 2018, the unemployment rate reached a new record low of 4.7 percent. The unemployment rate fluctuates throughout the year, reflecting the seasonal employment trends.

In October 2019, Walla Walla County reported the unemployment rate at 4.4 percent, a 0.4 percent increase from October 2018. The number of people in the local labor force was over 32,052 in October 2019, which is 3.4 percent higher than in October 2018. Employment for the resident labor force increased by 2.9 percent over the year to 30,627 in October 2019. The number of unemployed increased over the year by 15.5 percent, going to 1,425 in October 2019 as the result of an increased labor force.

Source: Employment Security Department/LMEA

Industry employment

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

Total covered employment in Walla Walla County was 27,841 in 2018, with an increase of 1.9 percent, or 528 jobs since 2017. Walla Walla County total covered payrolls totaled at \$1.24 billion in 2018, with average annual wages for covered employment at \$44,615 in 2018, an increase of 3.8 percent from 2017, when the average annual wage was \$42,999.

According to the BLS' Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, there were over 2,112 total establishments in Walla Walla County.

Goods-producing industries, which include agriculture and natural resources, mining, construction and manufacturing, increased in employment from 2017 to 2018 by 4.6 percent, or by 405 jobs. Average employment in 2018 was 8,526 workers and annual payrolls totaled \$384.2 million, which translated to a \$45,066 average annual wage for goods-producing workers. This represents about 30.6 percent of total employment.

- The manufacturing industry employment increased by 5.4 percent over the year. Manufacturing represented 14.1 percent of total covered employment. The average employment was 3,937 jobs in 2019, with total covered payrolls at \$227.9 million and an average annual payroll of \$57,910.
- Construction accounted for 3.1 percent of the total average annual employment in the county with 869 jobs. Over the year, construction increased by 1.4 percent, putting five-year average annual growth rate at 2.7 percent. The average annual wage in construction was \$44,974 in 2018, with an increase over the year by 5.4 percent.
- Agriculture is one of the primary industries in the area, representing 13.4 percent of total employment. It is, however, highly seasonal and volatile from year to year.
 - Average annual employment in agriculture in 2018 was 3,720, with an increase over the year of 5.5 percent. The five-year average annual growth rate has been 0.02 percent. The average annual wage in agriculture was \$31,496, mainly due to the seasonality of agricultural activities.

Service-providing industries are the major share (69.4 percent) of the Walla Walla County economy. They had an average of 19,318 jobs, which paid an average annual wage of \$45,066 in 2019 with an increase of 3.0 percent over the year.

- The Walla Walla County finance and insurance industry provided on average 606 jobs. The average annual wage for this industry was \$54,016, which is the fourth highest paying industry in the area.

- Retail trade is the fifth largest industry in Walla Walla County, representing 8.4 percent of total employment. Employment growth was recorded in food and beverage stores as well as general merchandise stores, which dominate the retail trade industry. In 2018, this industry had an average of 2,326 jobs and paid an average annual wage of \$27,996.
- The administrative and waste services industry totaled 488 jobs in 2018 with an 8.2 percent increase over the year. Total annual payroll for this industry was at \$13.2 million, which translates into the average annual wage of \$26,990.
- Healthcare and social assistance employment in the private sector had 4,213 jobs, which represented about 15.1 percent of total employment in 2018, making it the second largest industry in the area.
 - Over the year, this industry decreased by 3.5 percent, which contributed to the five-year average annual growth of 2.1 percent.
 - Total annual payroll in Walla Walla County was at \$206.5 million, translating into the average annual wage of \$49,005.
- Government made up 20.3 percent of total employment with 5,659 jobs in 2018. It provides public education, healthcare, social services, safety and many other services in the county. Total annual payroll was at \$313.1 million. It provided an average annual wage of \$55,321.

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

Source: Employment Security Department/LMEA

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.

Walla Walla County highlights:

In 2018, the largest share of employment in Walla Walla County was held by those 34 to 44 years old at 21.3 percent. Those aged 45 to 54 made up 20.7 percent of total employment, and 25 to 34 year-olds newly entering the workforce were close with a 20.6 percent share of total employment.

Walla Walla County employment in 2018 included 52.8 percent male workers and 47.2 percent female workers. Industry differences are discussed below:

- Male-dominated industries included construction (83.6 percent), utilities (82.6 percent), transportation and warehousing (81.0 percent), wholesale trade (73.3 percent) and manufacturing (70.6 percent).

- Female-dominated industries included healthcare and social assistance (76.2 percent), finance and insurance (70.7 percent), educational services (61.7 percent), and professional and technical services (57.3 percent).

Source: The Local Employment Dynamics

Wages and income

In 2018, there were 27,841 jobs in Walla Walla County covered by unemployment insurance, with a total payroll of over \$1.24 billion.

- The average annual wage was \$44,615, well below the state's average annual wage of \$66,195. The median hourly wage in 2018 was \$19.69, below the state's median hourly wage of \$25.98.
- Median household income was \$56,533 in 2018. This is much lower than the state average of \$70,116.
- In 2018, workers earned over 12.2 percent of their total wages working outside of the county, and an estimated 18.4 percent of county payrolls goes to earners who live outside the county.

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.

- Per capita income in Walla Walla County was \$46,144 in 2018, which is 84.8 percent of the U.S. average (\$54,446) and 74.4 percent of Washington's average (\$62,026).
- Investment income was 24.0 percent of per capita total income in 2018.
- Government transfer payments, as a proportion of total income, have risen steadily from 17 percent in 1969 to 22 percent in 2018.
- The poverty rate for Walla Walla County in 2018 was estimated at 13.3 percent, above the state's poverty rate of 10.3 percent and the national poverty rate of 11.8 percent.

Population

In 2019, Walla Walla County's population was 60,922, showing 3.6 percent growth from 2010 to 2019, compared to the state's growth rate of 13.2 percent.

The largest city in Walla Walla County is the city of Walla Walla with a population of 34,000 in 2019.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis; Washington State Office of Financial Management

Population facts

	Walla Walla County	Washington state
Population 2019	60,922	7,614,893
Population 2010	58,781	6,724,540
Percent change, 2010 to 2019	3.6%	13.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Age, gender and ethnicity

Walla Walla County population demographics differed from the state's in 2019.

- Walla Walla County's population under 18 years of age was 21.0 percent of the total compared to 22.1 percent for the state.
- Residents under the age of 5 years old made up 5.5 percent of the total population compared to 6.1 percent for the state.
- Walla Walla County's population 65 years and older made up 18.1 percent of the total compared to 15.4 percent for the state.

The county was 48.9 percent female compared to 50.0 percent for the state in 2019.

Walla Walla County differed from the state in racial and ethnic diversity in most categories in 2019. Hispanics and Latinos were 21.5 percent of the population compared with 12.9 percent in the state.

Demographics

	Walla Walla County	Washington state
Population by age, 2019		
Under 5 years old	5.5%	6.1%
Under 18 years old	21.0%	22.1%
65 years and older	18.1%	15.4%
Females, 2019	48.9%	50.0%
Race/ethnicity, 2019		
White	91.3%	78.9%
Black	2.3%	4.3%
American Indian, Alaskan Native	1.4%	1.9%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander	2.2%	10.1%
Hispanic or Latino, any race	21.5%	12.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Educational attainment

About 87.8 percent of Walla Walla County's population 25 years and older were high school graduates over the period 2014 to 2018. This graduation rate compares to 91.1 percent for the state.

Over the same period, those holding a bachelor's degree or higher made up 28.6 percent of Walla Walla County residents age 25 and older compared to 35.3 percent of state residents.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Useful links

- [County data tables](#)
- [Census Bureau Profile](#)
- [Walla Walla County on ChooseWashington.com](#)
- [Walla Walla County on ofm.wa.gov](#)
- [Walla Walla County History](#)
- [Walla Walla County homepage](#)
- [Eastern Washington Partnership Workforce Development Council](#)
- [Demographics and economic trends](#)
- [Port of Walla Walla](#)
- [Walla Walla Valley Wine Cluster – Economic Development project reports and Links](#)
- [Self Sufficiency Calculator for Washington State](#)
- [Census Bureau QuickFacts](#)
- [Washington Ports](#)
- [Workforce Development Areas and WorkSource Office Directory](#)

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