

Walla Walla County Profile

By Ajsa Suljic, regional labor economist
Updated December 2020



[Overview](#) | [Geographic facts](#) | [Outlook](#) | [Labor force and unemployment](#) | [Industry employment](#) | [Wages and income](#) | [Population](#) | [Useful links](#)

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 0.6 percent on average per year since 2014. Employment growth slowed down in 2019 to 0.1 percent over the year after a 1.9 percent increase in 2018. Covered employment volatility from year to year has shown areas of resiliency and weaknesses to large industry restructuring, seasonal and trade changes. In 2019, the county had eight industries decreasing, eight industries which increased and four industries with no change over the year.

Industries that have maintained stability in Walla Walla County for the past five years include: construction, manufacturing, transportation and warehousing, real estate, rental and leasing, 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 professional and business services, private education and healthcare services, and other business and population services and construction. Walla Walla County, as part of the Eastern Washington workforce development area, is expected to grow 1.29 percent a year through 2021 and 1.11 percent a year from 2023 to 2028.

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 30,252 in 2019, which is about 3.1 percent more than in 2018. Resident employment increased by 3.0 percent over the year. The number of people who were unemployed and looking for work totaled at 1,492 with an increase over the year of about 5.1 percent. The Walla Walla County unemployment rate was 4.9 percent in 2019, which was 0.1 percent more than in 2018.

During the past twelve 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 4.8 percent. The unemployment rate fluctuates throughout the year, reflecting the seasonal employment trends.

In November 2020, Walla Walla County reported the unemployment rate at 5.7 percent, a 1.1 percent increase from October 2020. The number of people in the local labor force was over 29,722 in November 2020, which is 6.8 percent lower than in October 2020. Employment for the resident labor force decreased by 7.9 percent over the month to 28,027 in November 2020. The number of unemployed increased over the month by 15.1 percent and over the year by 31.1 percent, going to 1,695 unemployed residents in November 2020.

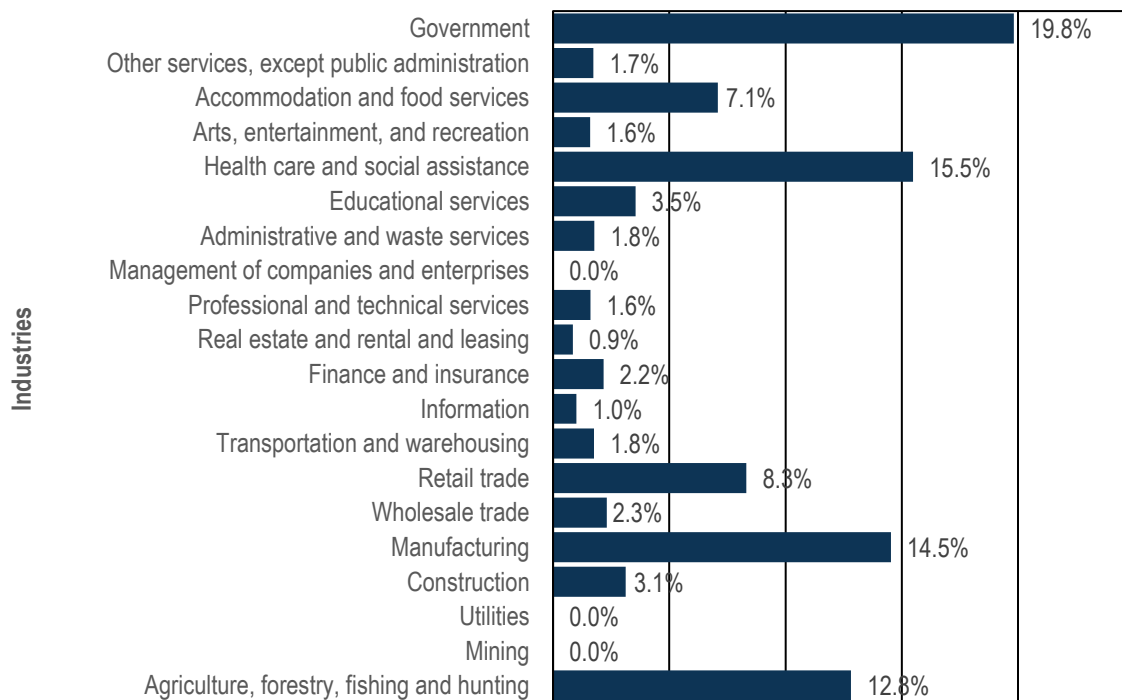
Source: Employment Security Department/LMEA; County data tables

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 27,857 in 2019, with an increase of 0.1 percent, or 16 jobs since 2018. Walla Walla County total covered payrolls totaled at \$1.29 billion in 2019, with average annual wages for covered employment at \$46,219 in 2019, an increase of 3.6 percent from 2018, when the average annual wage was \$44,615.

Industries by percent share of total employment



According to the BLS’ Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, there were over 2,204 total establishments in Walla Walla County.

Goods-producing industries, which include agriculture and natural resources, mining, construction and manufacturing, decreased in employment from 2018 to 2019 by 0.5 percent, or by 41 jobs. Average employment in 2019 was 8,485 workers and annual payrolls totaled \$392.5 million, which translated to a \$46,255 average annual wage for goods-producing workers. This represents about 30.5 percent of total employment.

- The manufacturing industry employment increased by 2.8 percent over the year. Manufacturing represented 14.5 percent of total covered employment. The average employment was 4,046 jobs in 2019, with total covered payrolls at \$233.5 million and an average annual payroll of \$57,699.
- Construction accounted for 3.1 percent of the total average annual employment in the county with 869 jobs. Over the year, construction had no changes in employment. The average annual wage in construction was \$48,010 in 2019, with an increase over the year by 6.8 percent.
- Agriculture is one of the primary industries in the area, representing 12.8 percent of total employment. It is, however, highly seasonal and volatile from year to year.
 - Average annual employment in agriculture in 2019 was 3,570, with a decrease over the year of 4.0 percent. Average annual wage in agriculture was \$32,860, mainly due to the seasonality of agricultural activities. Average annual wage increased by 4.3 percent over the year.

Service-providing industries are the major share (69.5 percent) of the Walla Walla County economy. They had an average of 19,372 jobs, which paid an average annual wage of \$46,203 in 2019.

- The Walla Walla County finance and insurance industry provided on average 605 jobs. The average annual wage for this industry was \$56,433 (an increase of 4.5 percent over the year). Finance and insurance is the fourth-highest paying industry in the area and makes up 2.2 percent of total employment in the county.
- Retail trade is the fifth-largest industry in Walla Walla County, representing 8.3 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 2019, this industry had an average of 2,315 jobs and paid an average annual wage of \$28,352, which increased by 1.3 percent over the year.
- The administrative and waste services industry totaled 494 jobs in 2019 with a 1.2 percent increase over the year. Total annual payroll for this industry was at \$14.3 million, which translates to an average annual wage of \$28,885, which increased by 7.0 percent or \$1,894 over the year.
- Healthcare and social assistance employment in the private sector had 4,311 jobs, which represented about 15.5 percent of total employment in 2019, making it the second-largest industry in the area.
 - Over the year, this industry increased by 2.3 percent, marking three years of consecutive growth after major layoffs and closures back in 2016.
 - Total annual payroll in Walla Walla County was at \$216.5 million, translating to an average annual wage of \$50,226, with an increase over the year of 2.5 percent or \$1,221 dollars.
- Government made up 19.8 percent of total employment with 5,520 jobs in 2019. It provided public education, healthcare, social services, safety and many other services in the county. Total annual payroll was at \$326.1 million. It provided an average annual wage of \$59,121, which increased by 6.9 percent over the year.

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

Source: Employment Security Department/LMEA; 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.

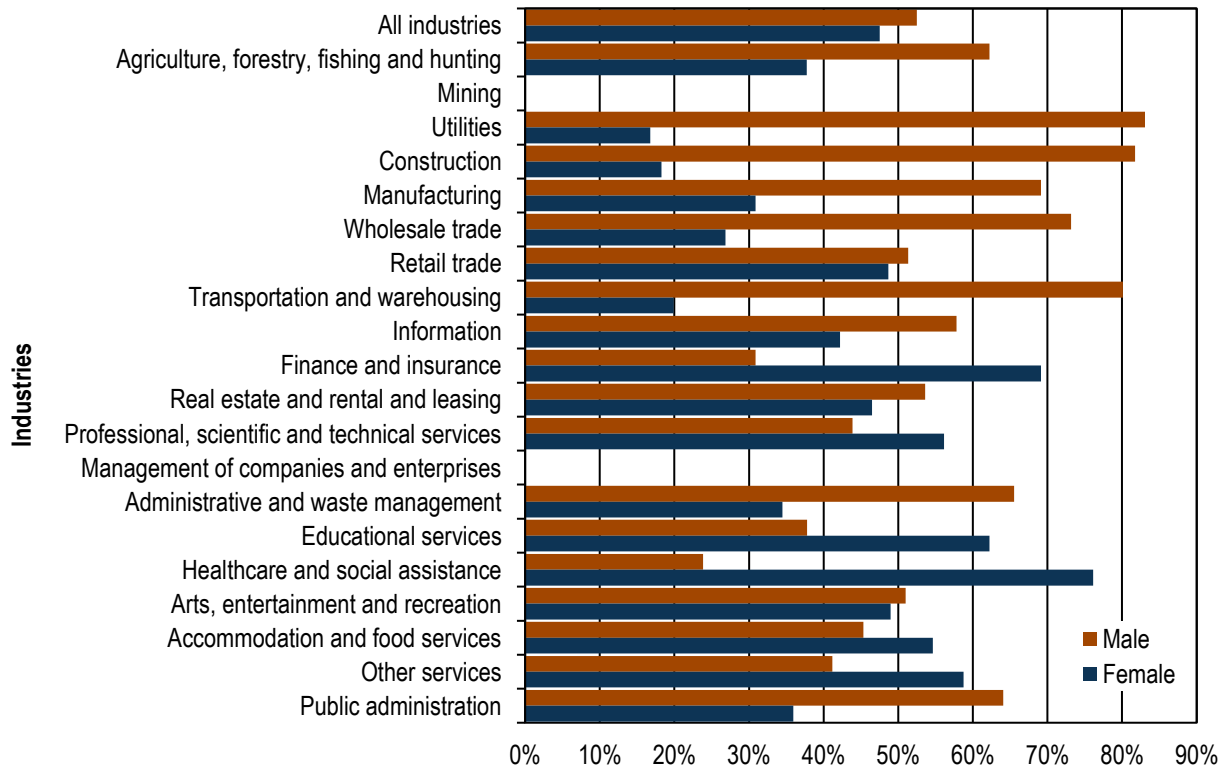
Walla Walla County highlights:

In 2019, the largest share of employment in Walla Walla County was held by those 34 to 44 years old at 21.5 percent. Those aged 25 to 34 year-olds newly entering the workforce were close with a 20.7 percent share of total employment. The 45 to 54 year-olds made up 19.5 percent of total employed in the county.

Walla Walla County employment in 2019 included 52.5 percent male workers and 47.5 percent female workers. Industry differences are discussed below:

- Male-dominated industries included construction (83.1 percent), utilities (81.7 percent), transportation and warehousing (80.1 percent), wholesale trade (73.2 percent) and manufacturing (69.1 percent).
- Female-dominated industries included healthcare and social assistance (76.1 percent), finance and insurance (69.1 percent), educational services (62.2 percent), and professional and technical services (56.1 percent).

Percent of industry jobs by sex in Walla Walla County for 2019



Source: Employment Security Department/LMEA; County data tables

Wages and income

In 2019, there were 27,857 jobs in Walla Walla County covered by unemployment insurance, with a total payroll of over \$1.29 billion.

- The average annual wage was \$46,219, well below the state's average annual wage of \$69,615 or state, less King county of \$52,669. The median hourly wage in 2018 was \$19.69, below the state's median hourly wage of \$25.98.
- Median household income was \$57,858 in 2019. This is much lower than the state average of \$73,775.
- In 2019, workers earned over 12.6 percent of their total wages working outside of the county, and an estimated 18.2 percent of county payrolls goes to earners who live outside the county.

Source: Employment Security Department/LMEA; County data tables; U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

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 \$48,444 in 2019 (an increase of 4.3 percent over the year), 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 24.0 percent of per capita total income in 2019.
- Government transfer payments, as a proportion of total income, have risen steadily from 11 percent in 1969 to 22 percent in 2019.
- The poverty rate for Walla Walla County in 2019 was estimated at 13.3 percent, above the state's poverty rate of 10.8 percent and the national poverty rate of 13.4 percent.

Population

In 2019, Walla Walla County's population was 60,760, showing 3.4 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 34,400 in 2020.

Source: Employment Security Department/LMEA; County data tables; U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Population facts

	Walla Walla County	Washington state
Population 2019	60,760	7,614,893
Population 2010	58,781	6,724,540
Percent change, 2010 to 2019	3.4%	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 20.7 percent of the total compared to 21.8 percent for the state.
- Residents under the age of 5 years old made up 5.3 percent of the total population compared to 6.0 percent for the state.
- Walla Walla County's population 65 years and older made up 18.7 percent of the total compared to 15.9 percent for the state.

The county was 49.1 percent female compared 49.9 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 21.7 percent of the population compared with 13.0 percent in the state.

Demographics

	Walla Walla County	Washington state
Population by age 2019		
Under 5 years old	5.3%	6.0%
Under 18 years old	20.7%	21.8%
65 years and older	18.7%	15.9%
Females 2019	49.1%	49.9%
Race/ethnicity 2019		
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	71.3%	67.5%
Black	2.2%	4.4%
American Indian, Alaskan Native	1.4%	1.9%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, & other Pacific Islander	2.1%	10.4%
Hispanic or Latino, any race	21.7%	13.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Educational attainment

About 88.3 percent of Walla Walla County's population 25 years and older were high school graduates over the period 2015 to 2019. This graduation rate compares to 91.3 percent for the state.

Over the same period, those holding a bachelor's degree or higher made up 29.8 percent of Walla Walla County residents age 25 and older compared to 36.0 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](#)

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.