

Whitman County Profile

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Overview

Regional context

Whitman County covers 2,159.09 square miles of land, ranking 10th in size among Washington's 39 counties. Whitman County was named after Marcus Whitman, an early pioneering missionary in the western states. The county is part of the Palouse region with wide and rolling landscapes. Located in southeastern Washington, it borders seven Washington counties and three Idaho counties. It is ranked 26th in population with a population density of 20.7 people per square mile.

The county is mostly agricultural land that's specialized in farming barley, wheat, dry peas and lentils. Pullman is the largest city mainly due to the Washington State University student population. The county seat is at Colfax, the second largest city.

Local economy

The largest employer, Washington State University (WSU), conducts transformational research and provides world-class education to more than 32,000 undergraduate, graduate and professional students. Founded in 1890 in Pullman, it is Washington's original land-grant university, with a mission of improving quality of life. Thirty percent of county employment is at WSU.

Agriculture continues to play an oversized role, not in terms of total employment but in terms of economic impact. In the first half of 2019 wheat prices dropped, which will effect county wholesale sales, retail sales and the overall level of money flowing through the economy.

Traditionally, employment in Whitman County tends to grow at a very slow and steady rate. Much of this trend is due to education employment's dominant share of total employment. Interestingly, the relative size of education employment has shrunk as other industries have increased their total number of jobs. Manufacturing employment has grown in 4 of the past 5 years. This trend towards greater diversification is a welcome development in county employment.

Geographic facts

	Whitman County	Rank in state
Land area, 2010 (square miles)	2,159.09	10
People per square mile, 2010	20.7	26

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Outlook

Agriculture employment is expected to continue its very slow growth in terms of jobs, as wheat production continues to become more mechanized. In 2019, wheat production was high but prices dropped, which has farmers concerned for the economic future. In addition, as farmers age finding replacement workers will be a challenge.

Export-related manufacturing and technical educational services are a source of positive growth for the county's economy. Unlike agriculture, as overall economic conditions change around the world, the types of products manufactured and education (WSU) in Whitman County are somewhat resistant to down cycles, which gives the county greater strength and diversity in its economy.

Employment at Washington State University continues to recover. Student enrollments keep increasing and the university added a new College of Medical Sciences to go along with the Colleges of Nursing and Pharmacy.

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 Whitman County civilian labor force for the first nine months of 2019 averaged 23,900, which is an increase of 525 over the same period a year ago. The increase in the labor force was due to growth in manufacturing and education employment.

The average annual unemployment rate in Whitman County is always one of the lowest in the state. The unemployment rate fluctuates throughout the year, reflecting its seasonal changes in higher education employment. In the first nine months of 2019, the unemployment rate averaged 4.6 percent.

Source: Employment Security Department/LMEA

Industry employment

Nonfarm employment in the county started recovering from the national recession in 2011 following national and state trends. The increases have been modest, but are accelerating.

- Goods-producing employment increased in the first half of 2019; manufacturing accounted for a majority of the growth. Planned expansions in manufacturing will increase manufacturing jobs into 2020.
- Service-providing employment also increased in the first half of 2019. The hot employment sectors was education, health services and professional and business services.

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.

Whitman County highlights:

Whitman County job holders in 2018 were almost equally distributed between two major age groups. The age group 25 to 34 accounted for 23.4 percent of employment, while 55 and older made up 22.8 percent of employment.

In 2018, 51.6 percent of all industry jobs were held by men and 48.4 percent were held by women. Industry differences are discussed below:

- Male-dominated industries included agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting (81.5 percent), construction (81.5 percent), wholesale trade (79.6 percent), transportation and warehousing (79.9 percent) and utilities (78.7 percent).
- Female-dominated industries included healthcare and social assistance (76.5 percent) and finance and insurance (64.6 percent).

Source: The Local Employment Dynamics

Wages and income

In 2018, Whitman County had 18,894 jobs covered by unemployment insurance, with a total payroll of over \$920 million.

The county average annual wage was \$48,685 in 2018, which is well below the state's average annual wage of \$66,195. In 2018, Whitman County ranked 12th for average annual wages among 39 counties in the state.

Personal income

Personal income includes earned income, investment income and government payments such as Social Security and Veterans Benefits. Per capita personal income equals total personal income divided by the resident population.

In 2017, the per capita income in Whitman County was \$37,486, which is well below the state's per capita income of \$57,896 according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Median household income over the period 2013 to 2017 was \$41,574, well below the state's \$66,174, according to the U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts.

Over the period 2013 to 2017, 21.4 percent of the population was living below the poverty level in Whitman County. This is well above 10.3 percent for the state. This is due in large part to the college student population.

Source: Employment Security Department/LMEA; Bureau of Economic Analysis; U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts.

Population

Whitman County's estimated population in 2018 was 49,791. Population growth in Whitman County from 2010 to 2018 was 11.2 percent, just below the state's increase of 12.1 percent.

The largest city in the county is Pullman with population of 34,019.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Population facts

	Whitman County	Washington state
Population 2018	49,791	7,535,591
Population 2010	44,778	6,724,540
Percent change, 2010 to 2018	11.2%	12.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Age, gender and ethnicity

Whitman County's population, due to the higher education industry concentration, is relatively young.

The county's population age 65 and older was 10.4 percent in 2018 compared to the state's 15.4 percent.

Diversity in the county is near state averages.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Demographics

	Whitman County	Washington state
Population by age, 2018		
Under 5 years old	4.2%	6.1%
Under 18 years old	15.0%	22.1%
65 years and older	10.4%	15.4%
Females, 2017	49.0%	50.0%
Race/ethnicity, 2018		
White	83.9%	78.9%
Black	2.4%	4.3%
American Indian, Alaskan Native	0.9%	1.9%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander	8.7%	10.1%
Hispanic or Latino, any race	6.6%	12.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Educational attainment

According to Census estimates, for the period 2013 to 2017 in Whitman County, 95.4 percent of individuals age 25 and older were high school graduates, which was much higher than that of Washington State (90.8 percent).

An estimated 48.4 percent of people in Whitman County 25 and older have attained a bachelor's degree or higher. This figure compares favorably with the state (34.5 percent).

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Useful links

- [County data tables](#)
- [Census Bureau Profile](#)
- [Whitman County History](#)
- [Whitman County on ofm.wa.gov](#)
- [Whitman County on ChooseWashington.com](#)
- [Whitman County home page](#)
- [Pullman Chamber of Commerce](#)
- [Southeast Washington Economic Development Association](#)
- [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.