



Agricultural Services Program

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Helping growers find qualified workers

In 2006, the Employment Security Department created a 21-county Agricultural Services Program to help growers recruit skilled workers in a timely manner. The counties involved in this effort are Yakima, Kittitas, Klickitat, Skamania, Okanogan, Chelan, Douglas, Grant, Ferry, Stevens, Pend Oreille, Lincoln, Whitman, Columbia, Garfield, Asotin, Walla Walla, Whatcom, Skagit, Benton and Franklin.

Expanding offices and extending hours

Following are some of the actions the department has taken under the Agricultural Services Program.

Increasing awareness about job openings and WorkSource services

- Established temporary satellite offices near agricultural employers and deployed mobile tents along roadways to help match workers with employers.
- Some WorkSource offices are open on weekends and earlier in the morning during peak cherry and apple harvests for maximum efficiency in connecting growers and workers.
- Outreach staff members are sent into communities to contact employers about their labor needs and to recruit workers. WorkSource employees go to places in the community where workers gather, such as churches, community events, large general-merchandise stores, clinics, community-based organizations and state community-service offices.

Actively recruiting workers

- Partnerships were formed with the state's Department of Labor & Industries, growers and local high schools to recruit teenagers for summer agricultural jobs. In 2007, nearly 1,600 students participated in 14 orientations, which included information about employing minors in farm work – and agricultural employers later reported that they hired 386 of these youths.
- Community-based partners that serve migrant and seasonal farmworkers have been informed about WorkSource services and current labor needs, and they've been asked to help recruit workers.
- Additional Spanish-speaking employees are assigned to local WorkSource centers and satellite offices that screen and refer qualified farmworkers to employers.
- Marketing efforts include using English and Spanish radio, TV and newspapers to promote agricultural job openings and WorkSource services.
- Weekly conference calls and meetings with growers are used to stay informed about crop sizes, harvest start dates and estimated labor needs.
- We obtain updates from farm-labor contractors and employment service offices in other states about the status of their harvests or possible issues that could affect Washington growers and workers.

Putting farmworkers back to work

- A referral system was created where farmworkers who are receiving unemployment benefits are referred back to their former agricultural employers for current job openings. The new program gives employers quick access to experienced workers. It also places claimants back to work faster and reduces the employers' unemployment taxes.
- A referral system was created where other qualified unemployment-insurance recipients were screened and referred to agricultural jobs – aimed at meeting agricultural-employer needs while also reducing the number of people on unemployment insurance.

Responding to customer needs

- A farm-labor Web site is available at www.wa.gov/esd/farmworkers to educate farmworkers about Washington agricultural jobs, types of crops, harvest activity, housing, education, health care and more.
- WorkSource employees have received special training to help growers apply for the federal Agricultural Recruitment System (ARS) and H-2A (guest-worker) programs. H-2A allows growers to import temporary workers from foreign countries, while the ARS helps employers recruit temporary workers from other states.

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