

Rural Migration News

Blog 278

MAY 2022

Oregon Agriculture and Labor

Oregon had 37,600 farms in 2017 that produced farm commodities worth \$5 billion, including 1,000 farms that each had sales of \$1 million or more. Most of the state’s farms, 21,000, are engaged in animal agriculture, including 12,000 beef cattle ranches. Fewer than 10 percent of the state’s farms are greenhouses and nurseries, the commodities that account for a quarter of the state’s farm sales.

In Oregon, about 70 percent of farm sales are from crops, including \$1.2 billion worth of greenhouse and nursery commodities and almost \$569 million worth of hay in 2020.

Data on individual Oregon crops are obscured by the fact that nursery crops, grass seed and hops and spearmint oil are often grouped with the miscellaneous crops that account for a third of the state’s farm sales.

Leading labor-intensive fruits included cherries worth \$133 million in 2020, blueberries worth \$120 million, and apples worth \$39 million. Bearing cherry acreage has been stable at about 12,000 acres, but yields have been rising toward an average five tons an acre.

Labor

Some 10,300 OR farms, about a quarter of all farms, reported \$1 billion in expenses for hired farm labor in the 2017 COA. Fewer than 1,700 OR farms had labor expenses of \$100,000 or more, and they accounted for 90 percent of the state’s farm labor expenses. Some 4,600 farms (often the same farms with direct hire expenses) reported \$170 million for contract labor expenses, for a total of almost \$1.2 billion, making labor costs a quarter of the state’s farm sales.

Census data that summarize farm production expenses by NAICS (Table 75) reported that 450 vegetable (NAICS 1112) farms had \$92 million in direct-hire labor expenses, 1,860 fruit farms (1112) had \$223 million in direct-hire labor expenses, and 1,200 greenhouse and nursery (1114) farms had \$325 million in direct-hire labor expenses. FVH agriculture accounted for \$640 million or almost two-thirds of the \$1 billion in OR direct-hire farm labor expenses.

Census county data (Table 7) report that 10,300 farms hired 86,250 workers; workers who were employed on two farms were counted twice. As with farm labor expenses, hired farm workers were concentrated on the largest farms. The 1,500 farms that hired 10 or

Oregon has a Stable Number of Farms and Rising Farm Sales

Table 1. Oregon farm and ranch highlights

Category	1997	2002	2007	2012	2017
Number of farms and ranches	39,975	40,033	38,553	35,439	37,616
Total land in agriculture (millions of acres)	17.7	17.2	16.4	16.3	16.0
Total ag land and buildings value (billion dollars)	17.7	20.4	31.0	31.0	38.8
Average value/acre (dollars)	1,005	1,185	1,802	1,882	2,433
Market value of farm sales (billion dollars)	3.9	3.8	4.8	4.9	5.0
Net farm income (billion dollars)	0.67	0.50	0.86	0.96	0.74

Source: https://agsci.oregonstate.edu/sites/agscid7/files/main/about/oragecon_report_2021.pdf

more workers employed 62,000 or 72 percent of all directly hired workers. Most of the workers who were hired directly were employed on the responding farm for less than 150 days, some 59,000 or almost 70 percent were seasonal hires.

Four counties accounted for over 40 percent of Oregon's hired workers, led by over 13,000 workers hired in Marion county and 7,000 to 8,000 each in Clackamas, Hood River, and Wasco counties.

Oregon requires almost all farm employers to participate in unemployment insurance. UI data find half as many employers as the COA, 4,600 establishments in 2020, an average 53,000 workers, and \$2.1 billion in wages paid or an average \$770 a week. The UI average employment is akin to year-round job slots; there are often two workers per year-round job, so OR could have over 100,000 unique farm workers. UI farm wages are significantly higher than COA farm labor expenses.

Employment in OR crop agriculture (111) rose over 10 percent between 2000 and 2020 as seasonality declined. Peak-month employment was over 40,000 workers in July 2020, almost twice trough-month employment of 22,000 in January. In 2003, peak July crop employment was 44,000 and trough January employment was less than 17,000 for a peak-trough ratio of 2.6.

Average employment on Oregon crop farms fell during the first decade of the 21st century to a low of 25,000 in 2011 and rose to over 29,000 by 2020. Unlike the fewer and larger story in most states, Oregon has a rising number of UI crop employers—their number rose 70 percent from 1,700 in 2011 to 2,500 in 2020.

Most Oregon Crop Sales are from the Willamette Valley and Columbia River Counties



Source: <https://oregonaitc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Grown-in-Oregon-Map-2020.png>

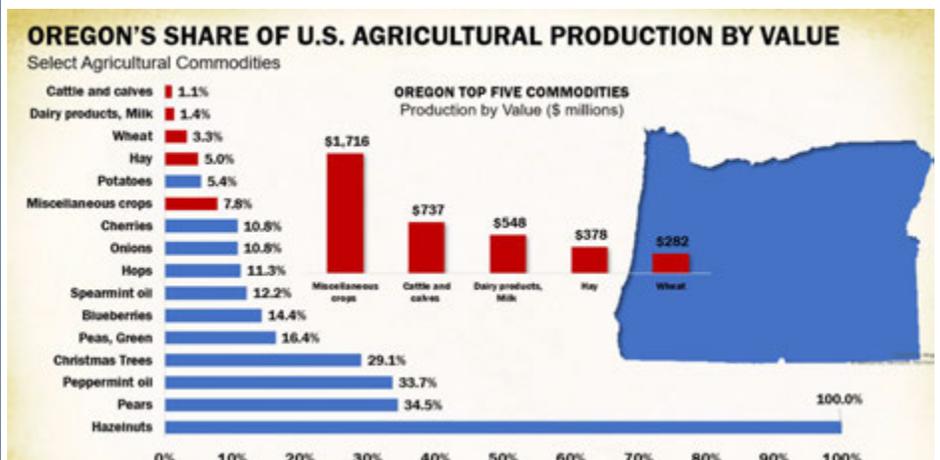
Almost half of Oregon crop employment is in two sectors. Greenhouse and nursery farms account for over a third of average employment in Oregon crop agriculture, and non-apple tree fruits such as cherries and pears account for almost 15 percent. Greenhouse and nursery employment fell from a peak of almost 13,000 in 2007 to 10,000 in 2020, while non-apple tree fruit

employment peaked at 4,700 in 2013-14 and was 4,000 in 2020.

Marion county's 100 greenhouse and nursery establishments account for a third of OR's greenhouse and nursery employment, and pay average weekly wages of \$780.

Greenhouse and nursery farms pay higher wages than non-apple tree

Greenhouse, Nursery, and Other Miscellaneous Crops Account for a Third of Oregon's \$5 Billion Farm Sales



Source: <https://www.fb.org/market-intel/assessing-western-drought-conditions-natural-disasters-compound-severe-drou>

Cherries are the Most Valuable Labor-Intensive Fruit

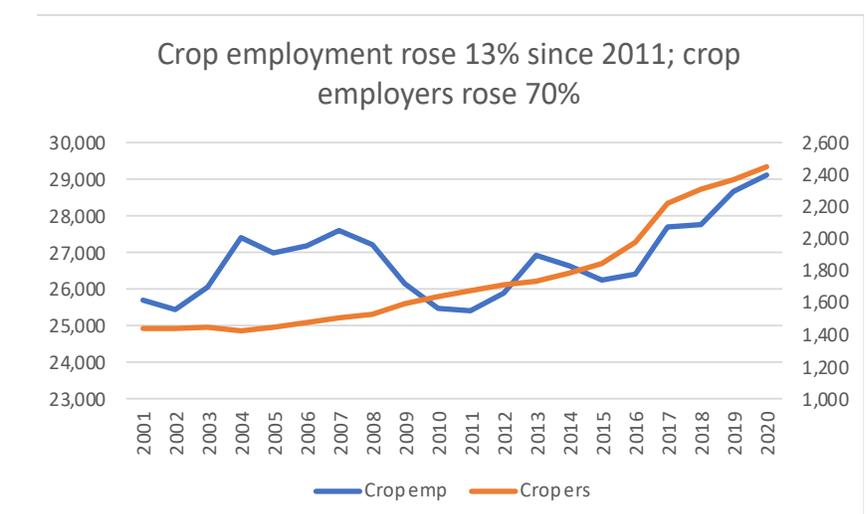
Selected Crop Acreage, Yield, Production, and Value — Oregon: 2019-2020

Crop and production unit	2019				2020			
	Harvested	Yield per acre	Production	Value of production	Harvested	Yield per acre	Production	Value of production
	(1,000 acres)	(unit)	(1,000 units)	(1,000 dollars)	(1,000 acres)	(unit)	(1,000 units)	(1,000 dollars)
Field crops								
Wheat, winter.....bushels	730.0	68.0	49,640	284,437	725.0	64.0	46,400	273,760
Barley.....bushels	35.0	78.0	2,730	10,374	30.0	72.0	2,160	8,424
Oats.....bushels	9.0	97.0	873	(D)	7.0	100.0	700	1,834
Corn, grain.....bushels	49.0	237.0	11,613	50,400	65.0	241.0	15,665	77,542
Corn, silage.....tons	35.0	24.0	840	(NA)	34.0	23.0	782	(NA)
Sugarbeets.....tons	9.8	38.5	377	19,189	9.4	40.9	384	(NA)
Hay, all.....tons	970.0	3.5	3,362	657,580	960.0	3.1	2,976	569,160
Hay, alfalfa.....tons	400.0	4.7	1,880	378,000	360.0	4.6	1,656	339,480
Hay, other.....tons	570.0	2.6	1,482	281,580	600.0	2.2	1,320	229,680
Potatoes.....cwt	42.9	590.0	25,311	233,874	45.0	600.0	27,000	216,000
Hops.....pounds	7.3	1,783.0	13,023	71,628	7.1	1,755.0	12,469	74,812
Peppermint.....pounds	19.0	95.0	1,805	35,559	18.0	96.0	1,728	34,042
Spearmint.....pounds	2.3	125.0	288	4,579	2.6	100.0	260	(D)
Fruit and Nut crops ^{1 2}								
Apples.....pounds	5.0	30,000.0	150,000	38,746	5.0	35,000.0	175,000	39,208
Cherries, sweet.....pounds	12.5	9,160.0	114,400	75,221	12.0	9,400.0	112,800	133,826
Hazelnuts.....tons	50.0	0.9	45	86,400	60.0	1.1	63	132,300
Pears, all.....tons	14.4	15.7	226	104,159	13.9	15.1	210	97,552
Berry crops								
Blueberries.....pounds	13.3	11,700.0	155,500	134,254	13.5	11,400.0	154,000	119,648
Cranberries.....barrels	2.7	206.8	558	16,562	2.8	215.6	604	21,337
Vegetable crops								
Snap Beans.....cwt	12.2	150.0	1,830	27,909	10.0	135.0	1,350	20,558
Green Peas.....cwt	17.5	34.0	595	6,896	14.6	34.0	496	5,862
Onion, all.....cwt	20.3	735.0	14,921	108,409	19.8	803.0	15,892	118,665
Sweet Corn, all.....cwt	23.7	205.0	4,859	38,103	25.7	190.0	4,883	41,034

fruit farms, an average 50 percent more or \$775 versus \$520 a week in 2020. The greenhouse and nursery wage premium peaked at 65 percent over non-apple tree fruit in 2003-04, and was only 35 percent in 2016. Average weekly wages represent total wages paid by employers in a particular commodity divided by average employment in that commodity, and may not reflect the peak hourly piece rate earnings of harvest workers.

OR and WA are important producers of cherries and pears. A comparison of average weekly wages in this sector over the past two decades shows that wages were higher in Oregon between 2001 and 2003, after which wages in Washington were higher, peaking in 2014 when WA farm wages were almost 20 percent higher than OR farm wages. In 2020, average WA cherry and pear weekly wages of \$585 were almost 15 percent higher than OR's \$520.

Growth in Crop Employers is Faster than Growth in Crop Employment Since 2011



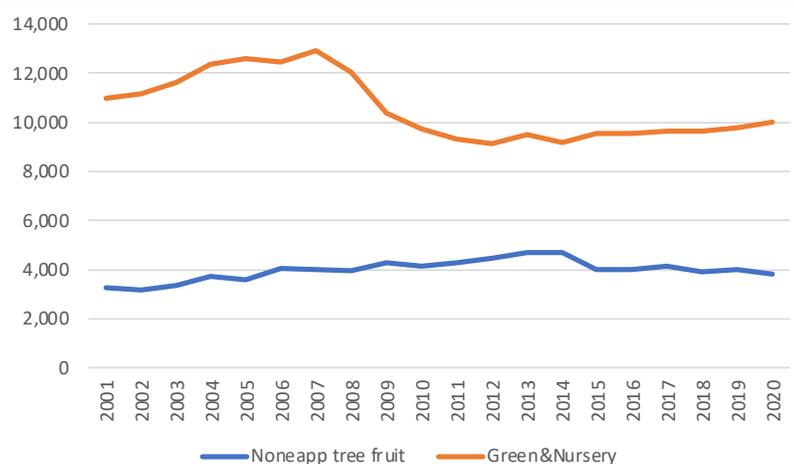
Employers Reported 86,000 Hired Workers in 2017, Including 70% on the Farm Less than 150 Days

Table 7. Hired Farm Labor - Workers and Payroll: 2017

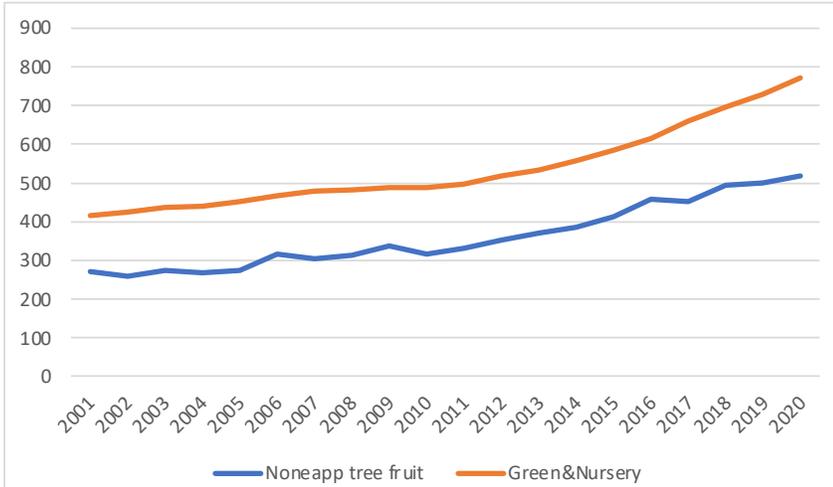
[For meaning of abbreviations and symbols, see introductory text.]

Item	Oregon	Baker	Benton	Clackamas	Clatsop	Columbia
Hired farm labor						
farms	10,294	190	270	1,031	48	175
workers	86,240	679	1,613	8,223	478	810
\$1,000 payroll	1,008,113	10,141	20,284	110,854	2,130	6,925
Farms with-						
1 worker	3,058	68	69	284	20	43
workers	3,058	68	69	284	20	43
2 workers	2,185	52	49	238	6	55
workers	4,370	104	98	476	12	110
3 or 4 workers	1,942	23	70	196	6	48
workers	6,670	75	247	672	22	161
5 to 9 workers	1,604	34	48	169	14	20
workers	10,171	217	301	1,078	(D)	128
10 workers or more	1,505	13	34	144	2	9
workers	61,971	215	898	5,713	(D)	368
Workers by days worked:						
150 days or more	4,696	100	141	368	14	38
workers	27,561	289	569	3,365	66	241
Farms with-						
1 worker	1,631	33	56	122	5	14
workers	1,631	33	56	122	5	14
2 workers	984	23	31	65	-	16
workers	1,968	46	62	130	-	32
3 or 4 workers	875	19	27	57	2	4
workers	2,935	(D)	86	198	(D)	13
5 to 9 workers	663	24	15	56	6	2
workers	4,114	133	95	350	42	(D)
10 workers or more	543	1	12	68	1	2
workers	16,913	(D)	270	2,565	(D)	(D)
Less than 150 days	8,259	132	228	844	39	154
farms	58,679	390	1,044	4,858	412	569
workers						
Farms with-						
1 worker	2,677	58	74	226	18	38
workers	2,677	58	74	226	18	38
2 workers	1,903	33	60	225	5	50
workers	3,806	66	120	450	10	100
3 or 4 workers	1,596	24	46	173	7	41
workers	5,424	82	160	588	(D)	134
5 to 9 workers	1,075	8	21	119	8	19
workers	6,720	49	131	738	(D)	132
10 workers or more	1,008	9	27	101	1	6
workers	40,052	135	559	2,858	(D)	165
Reported only workers working						
150 days or more	2,035	58	42	187	9	21
workers	7,645	122	118	1,042	32	47
\$1,000 payroll	211,854	3,428	2,107	32,704	533	827
Reported only workers working						
less than 150 days	5,598	90	129	663	34	137
workers	18,033	211	463	1,978	93	377
\$1,000 payroll	49,989	818	759	4,766	84	(D)
Reported both - workers working						
150 days or more and workers						
working less than 150 days	2,661	42	99	181	5	17
farms	19,916	167	451	2,323	(D)	194
150 days or more, workers	40,646	179	581	2,880	(D)	192
less than 150 days, workers	746,269	5,895	17,418	73,085	1,514	(D)
\$1,000 payroll						
Total migrant workers	688	6	15	53	1	-
farms	21,131	29	333	1,038	(D)	-
workers						
Migrant farm labor on farms with hired labor	576	6	15	40	1	-
farms	19,384	29	333	949	(D)	-
workers						

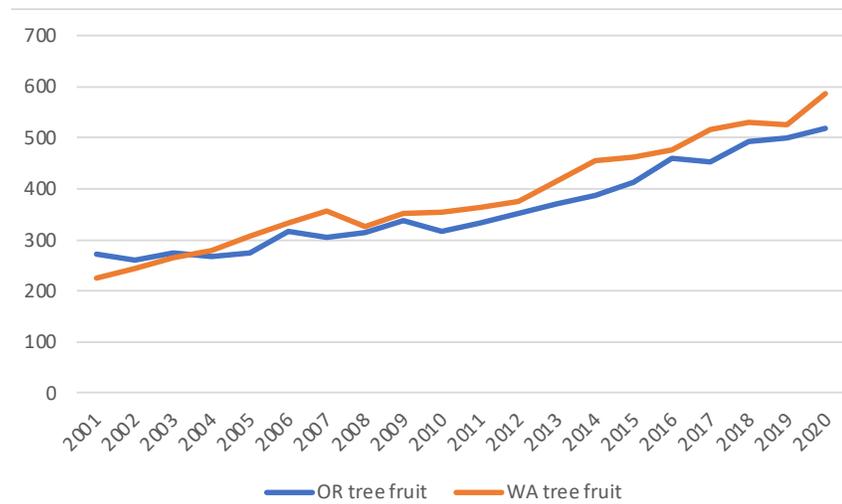
Average Greenhouse and Nursery Employment Peaked in 2007; Cherry and Pear Employment Peaked in 2013-14



Average Weekly Wages in G&N are 50 Percent Higher than in Cherries and Pears



Average Weekly Wages in G&N are 50 Percent Higher than in Cherries and Pears



References

Oregon Agricultural Statistics & Directory. <https://www.oregon.gov/oda/shared/Documents/Publications/Administration/AgStatsDirectory.pdf>

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