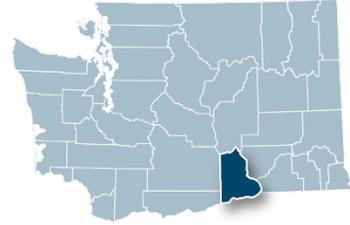


# Benton County profile

By Ajsa Suljic  
Regional labor economist  
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## Overview

### ***Regional context***

Benton County, named after Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton, was created from eastern Yakima and Klickitat counties in 1905. The county is located in southeastern Washington at the confluence of the Columbia, Snake and Yakima rivers. The Columbia River defines the north, south and east boundaries, making the county part of the semi-arid river basin in the rain shadow of the Cascade, Blue, Wallowa and Rocky mountains. Ranching and dry-land farming made up the bulk of its economy in the 1800s. Today, it is the ninth most densely populated county in the state with 103 persons per square mile due to its nuclear-related and other research and development industries. Agriculture is still a large producer in the area.

### ***Local economy***

Deer and elk, along with fishing, seeds, roots and berries provided food for the indigenous people in the area even though there was little rainfall. Migrations of white settlers into the area in the 19th century disrupted this tribal world, and the Indian Wars of the 1850s resulted in tribes being moved to reservations.

The gold rush of 1858 in British Columbia brought the first large group of whites through the area. By the 1870s, cattle and horse ranchers occupied the majority of land in the area. In the 1880s, major settlements along the Columbia River were connected by steamboats and railroads, allowing farmers and ranchers to get products to market. Farming included corn, wheat, alfalfa, potatoes and fruit, especially apples. Many farmers were successful in dry-land farming. However, in the 1890s, the Yakima Irrigation and Improvement Company built the first irrigation canals. With irrigation, railroad and electricity development, there were accompanying expansions of orchards, vineyards, farming and ranching.

World War II brought the Hanford Project into the county to develop the plutonium used in the first nuclear bomb. Continued federal investment has led to scientific diversification and nuclear and chemical cleanup, with skilled engineers and scientists following the jobs. In the late 1980s, Washington State University expanded into the area, offering advanced degrees. The well-educated, trained workforce has made many contributions in agricultural production, processing and research. Over time, the county has attracted a variety of manufacturers, including production of chemicals, fertilizer and zirconium tubing and titanium, along with supporting storage and distribution centers.

Growth and prosperity have continued with population growth and development centering in Kennewick, Richland and Prosser. Recreational industries and tourist attractions are developing along with the popularity of the wine industry. The economy is tied to agriculture, food processing, medical equipment manufacturing, energy production, nuclear-fuel fabrication, wine production and wine tourism.

## Geographic facts

|                                | Benton County | Rank in state |
|--------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Land area, 2010 (square miles) | 1,700.38      | 22            |
| People per square mile, 2010   | 103           | 9             |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

## Outlook

Benton County economic and employment growth expanded rapidly in the past five years and continues to reach new peaks. The county's economy increased by 1.2 percent or 5,159 jobs from 2015 to 2020. In 2019, employment peaked at 91,747, but with pandemic impacts on employment, the county saw a decrease in covered employment by 4,298 or 4.7 percent. The largest industry decreases in 2020 occurred in accommodation and food services, and arts, entertainment, and recreation services. Government and other service-providing industries were close in regards of loses due to COVID-19 business closures.

Six industries out of twenty either remained unchanged or increased. The largest increase in employment was recorded in the finance and insurance industry with 77 new jobs, followed by transportation and warehousing with 74 new jobs in 2020.

As the economy becomes more stable and moves forward with new markets, new products and technology in research and development, the construction, transportation and warehousing, health care and social assistance industries are expected to play a big role in Benton County's future prosperity.

One example of continuous growth is in construction services, which expanded by 9.8 percent a year over the past five years, and it is marching forward with growth to accommodate ever-growing demand. Health care and social assistance is another industry expected to contribute to the county's overall economic growth in the years to come, following its outstanding performance over the past five years with 9.5 percent average growth per year.

Nonfarm employment projections are done for Benton and Franklin counties combined, and the two counties together are expected to grow at the rate of 1.0 percent per year through 2029.

Industries that are projected to add the most jobs include private and public education, health care, construction, and other services.

Source: Benton County data tables; Employment Security Department/DATA Division

## 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.

Benton County’s civilian labor force was estimated to be 104,709 in 2021, a decrease of 0.8 percent over 2020, which followed a 1.4 percent increase in 2020 and 4.6 percent increase in 2019. The annual average unemployment rate for 2021 was 5.6 percent, which was 2.3 percent lower than in 2020. Total civilian employment increased by 1.7 percent, or 1,660 workers over the year.

The county’s labor force has expanded every year since 2014, as more workers participate in workforce activities, while at the same time residents are able to find jobs in an expanding economy.

## Industry employment

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

Benton County’s total covered employment was 87,449 in 2020, a decrease of 4.7 percent, or 4,298 jobs since 2019. The county’s total covered payroll was \$5.4 billion, an increase of 2.3 percent over 2019. The average annual wage in Benton County was \$61,382 in 2020, an increase of 7.3 percent over the average annual wage of \$57,182 in 2019.

Source: Employment Security Department, DATA Division, Benton County data tables

### Top 10 industries in Benton County

| Rank | Industry                            | Percent share of total employment |
|------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1    | Health care and social assistance   | 15.4%                             |
| 2    | Government                          | 13.4%                             |
| 3    | Administrative and waste services   | 11.7%                             |
| 4    | Retail trade                        | 10.9%                             |
| 5    | Professional and technical services | 9.9%                              |
| 6    | Construction                        | 8.4%                              |
| 7    | Accommodation and food services     | 7.7%                              |
| 8    | Agriculture                         | 6.7%                              |
| 9    | Manufacturing                       | 5.0%                              |
| 10   | Finance and insurance               | 2.4%                              |

Goods-producing industries, which include natural resources, mining, construction and manufacturing, decreased in employment from 2019 to 2020 by 4.0 percent, or 735 jobs. Average annual employment in 2020 was 17,696 workers and annual wages totaled \$989.6 million, which translates to a \$54,122 average annual wage for goods-producing workers.

- Manufacturing represented 5.0 percent of total covered employment in Benton County.
  - The average annual pay was at \$61,689 in 2020.
  - The manufacturing industry decreased in employment by 3.3 percent over the year. The average employment was at 4,375 jobs in 2020.

- Construction accounted for 8.4 percent of the total average annual employment in the county with 7,364 jobs.
  - The average annual wage in construction was \$70,480 in 2020.
  - Construction employment in the county decreased after seven years of continuous expansion.
- Agriculture is one of the base industries in the area, representing 6.7 percent of total employment. It is, however, highly seasonal and volatile from year to year.
  - Average annual employment in agriculture in 2020 was 5,828, with a decrease of 6.3 percent from 2019.
  - The average annual wage in agriculture was \$33,715, mainly due to the seasonality of agricultural activities.

Service-providing industries are a major share (79.8 percent) of the county's economy. There was an average of 69,753 jobs, with a decrease of 4.9 percent, or 3,563 jobs. Service-providing industries paid an average annual wage of \$62,653 in 2020.

- Health care and social assistance employment in the private sector was 13,507 jobs, which represented about 15.4 percent of total employment in 2020, and the largest industry cluster in the county.
  - Health care and social assistance decreased by 0.1 percent from 2019, with decreases in different segments including hospitals and ambulatory health care services. Average 5-year annual employment growth in this industry is at 5.6 percent. The average annual wage in this industry was \$52,781.
- Government employment, which includes both public education and health care, totaled 11,675 in 2020, which is the second-largest industry in the area with a decrease of 3.9 percent from 2019.
  - It had the third-largest payroll in the county at \$839.4 million, with an average annual wage of \$71,889.
- The administrative and support and waste management and remediation industry sector in Benton County represented 11.7 percent of total employment. This is the third-largest employing industry in the county.
  - The average annual employment in this sector was 10,193 in 2020, with a decrease of 2.4 percent from 2019.
  - Total covered payrolls were \$908.1 million in 2020, with an increase of 6.4 percent over the year. Average annual wages for this sector were \$89,082.
- Retail trade is the fourth-largest employing industry in Benton County, representing 10.9 percent share of total covered employment.
  - In 2020, this industry had an average of 9,526 jobs, a decrease of 1.7 percent over the year. It had a \$334.5 million payroll and an average annual wage of \$35,114.
  - The largest contributor to the decrease was clothing and clothing accessories stores; all the other segments recorded losses in employment in 2019. The largest increase in retail employment was recorded in building materials and garden supply stores.

- The professional, scientific and technical services industry is the fifth-largest private industry in Benton County with 9.9 percent share of total employment.
  - This industry had an average annual employment of 8,676, with a decrease of 2.2 percent from 2019.
  - Total payroll for this industry was \$896.8 million, with an increase of 0.1 percent over the year. Average annual wages were \$103,362 for this industry. It is the second-largest paying industry in the county with the largest payroll on record.
- Accommodation and food services decreased 15.6 percent over the year, with total employment averaging 6,698 in 2020. This industry continues to expand at the rate of 1.5 percent a year for the past five years.
  - Total payrolls were \$145.2 million with an average annual wage of \$21,675.

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

Source: Employment Security Department, Data Division, Benton 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.

#### ***Benton County highlights:***

In 2020, the largest share of employment was held by 25 to 34 year-olds at 22.3 percent, which is close to the state's figure of 23.0 percent. The age group of 35 to 44 year-olds had a 22.3 percent share of employment, followed by those 45 to 54 years old at 19.0 percent.

- The county's employment was 51.8 percent male workers and 48.2 percent females.
- Male-dominated industries included construction (81.8 percent), utilities (76.0 percent), wholesale trade (74.8 percent), transportation and warehousing (75.5 percent) and administrative and waste management (68.4 percent).
- Female-dominated industries included health care and social assistance (80.3 percent), educational services (73.1 percent), finance and insurance (66.1 percent), arts, entertainment and recreation (54.8 percent), and accommodation and food services (56.7 percent).

Source: Employment Security Department, DATA Division, Benton County data tables; The Local Employment Dynamics

### **Wages and income**

In 2020, there were 87,449 jobs in Benton County covered by unemployment insurance, with a total payroll of over \$5.4 billion.

The average annual wage was \$61,382 in 2020 for Benton County, while for the state it was \$73,504 and the state, less King County, was \$50,834. Benton County's average annual wage is the third-highest in the state. The median hourly wage in 2020 was \$27.05, below the state's median hourly wage of \$29.28.

Source: Employment Security Department, DATA Division, Benton County data tables

## Personal income

In 2020, Benton County's personal income totaled at \$10.7 billion and per capita personal income was \$51,757, less than the state (\$67,126) and the nation (\$59,510).

According to the American Community Survey, the Benton County median household income was \$72,084 in 2019. The median household income of the state was \$78,687 during the same time period.

Benton County's poverty rate of 11.3 percent is above Washington state's rate of 9.8 percent and below the national poverty rate of 12.3 percent in 2019, according to American Community Survey.

Source: Employment Security Department, Benton County data tables

## Population

In 2021, Benton County's population was 210,025 with 19.9 percent growth from 2010 to 2021, compared to the state's growth rate of 15.1 percent over the same time period.

The largest city in Benton County is Kennewick with a population of 84,921 in 2020. The second-largest city is Richland with a population of 60,560. The third-largest is West Richland with a population of 16,295.

### Population facts

|                              | Benton County | Washington state |
|------------------------------|---------------|------------------|
| Population 2021              | 210,025       | 7,738,692        |
| Population 2010              | 175,177       | 6,724,540        |
| Percent change, 2010 to 2020 | 19.9%         | 15.1%            |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

### Age, gender and ethnicity

Benton County has a younger population than does the state.

- Benton County's largest population was under 18 years of age (26.6 percent) compared to the state (21.8 percent) in 2021.
- Residents under the age of 5 years old made up 6.9 percent of the total population compared to 6.0 percent in the state in 2021.
- In 2021, Benton County's population of those 65 years and older made up 15.4 percent of the total compared to 15.9 percent of the state's population.

The gender split in the county was 49.9 percent female compared to 49.9 percent in the state in 2021.

Benton County is not as racially or ethnically diverse as the state except in its Hispanic or Latino residents, who can be any race. Hispanics or Latinos were 22.6 percent of the population compared with 13.0 percent in the state.

## Demographics

|  | Benton County | Washington state |
|--|---------------|------------------|
| <b>Population by age</b>                       |               |                  |
| Under 5 years old                              | 6.9%          | 6.0%             |
| Under 18 years old                             | 26.6%         | 21.8%            |
| 65 years and older                             | 15.4%         | 15.9%            |
| <b>Females</b>                                 | <b>49.9%</b>  | <b>49.9%</b>     |
| <b>Race/ethnicity</b>                          |               |                  |
| White  | 90.0%         | 78.5%            |
| Black  | 1.8%          | 4.4%             |
| American Indian, Alaskan Native                | 1.3%          | 1.9%             |
| Asian, Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander | 3.6%          | 10.4%            |
| Hispanic or Latino, any race                   | 22.6%         | 13.0%            |

## Educational attainment

About 91.0 percent of Benton County's population 25 years and older were high school graduates, 2016 to 2020 This graduation rate compares to that of the state's rate of 91.7 percent.

Those holding a bachelor's degree or higher made-up 31.6 percent of Benton County residents age 25 and older compared to 36.7 percent of state residents during the same period.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

## Useful links

- [County data tables](#)
- [Census Bureau Profile](#)
- [Benton County home page](#)
- [Benton County on ChooseWashington.com](#)
- [Benton County on HistoryLink.org](#)
- [Benton County on ofm.wa.gov](#)
- [Benton-Franklin Workforce Development Council](#)
- [City of Kennewick](#)
- [City of Prosser](#)
- [City of Richland](#)
- [City of West Richland](#)
- [Self Sufficiency Calculator for Washington State](#)
- [Prosser Economic Development Organization](#)
- [Tri-City Industrial Development Council](#)
- [U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts](#)
- [Port of Benton](#)
- [Port of Kennewick](#)
- [Washington Ports](#)
- [Washington State University Benton/Franklin County Extension](#)
- [Workforce Development Areas and WorkSource Office Directory](#)

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