

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 (WSU) student population. The county seat is at Colfax, the second largest city.

Local economy

The largest employer, 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 2021, wheat prices increased, which has a large impact on 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 five of the past six 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 2021, wheat production was at record yields. Good prices for wheat and barley were a welcome financial relief from previous years of low prices. Farmers are optimistic and are buying equipment which is important to local communities. However, as farmers age, finding replacement workers will be a challenge.

Export-related manufacturing and technical educational services are a source of growth for the county's economy. The types of manufactured products and education services (WSU) in Whitman County are somewhat resistant to down cycles, which gives the county greater strength and diversity in its economy.

Employment at WSU continues to recover. Student enrollments keep increasing since 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 2021 averaged 23,335, an increase from 2020. When compared to 2020, the temporary loss of jobs due to business restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic are striking. A better comparison is to look at the labor force before the pandemic. In that analysis, the Whitman County labor force has fully recovered.

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 and agriculture. In 2021, the unemployment rate averaged 4.3 percent.

Source: Employment Security Department/DATA Division, County Data Tables

Industry employment

Nonfarm employment in the county started recovering from pandemic business restrictions in the last half of 2021, following national and state trends.

- Goods-producing employment increased in 2021; manufacturing and construction accounted for all the growth. Manufacturing was an essential industry during the pandemic. Planned expansions in manufacturing will increase manufacturing jobs into 2022.
- Service-providing employment increased in the second half of 2021. State and local government, education, leisure and hospitality and transportation and warehousing all gained back jobs to pre-pandemic levels.

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

Source: Employment Security Department/DATA Division, 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.

Whitman County highlights:

Whitman County job holders in 2020 were almost equally distributed between two major age groups. The age group 25 to 34 accounted for 23.5 percent of employment, while 55 and older made-up 23.4 percent of employment.

In 2020, 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 (79.3 percent), construction (78.2 percent), wholesale trade (78.8 percent), transportation and warehousing (78.8 percent) and utilities (75.5 percent).
- Female-dominated industries included health care and social assistance (76.4 percent) and finance and insurance (66.6 percent).

Source: Employment Security Department/DATA Division, County Data Tables

Wages and income

In 2020, Whitman County had 17,794 jobs covered by unemployment insurance, with a total payroll of over \$977.4 million.

The county average annual wage was \$54,928 in 2020, which is well below the state's average annual wage of \$76,801.

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 2020, the per capita income in Whitman County was \$44,628, which is well below the state's per capita income of \$67,126 according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Median household income over the period 2016 to 2020 was \$42,288, well below the state's \$77,006, according to the U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts.

Over the period 2016 to 2020, 15.7 percent of the population was living below the poverty level in Whitman County. This is well above 9.5 percent for the state. This is due in large part to the college student population.

Source: Employment Security Department/DATA Division, County Data Tables; Bureau of Economic Analysis; U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts.

Population

Whitman County's estimated population in 2021 was 47,873. Population decreased slightly in Whitman County from 2020 to 2021 (-0.2 percent), just below the state's increase of 0.4 percent.

The largest city in the county is Pullman.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Population facts

	Whitman County	Washington state
Population 2021	47,873	7,738,692
Population 2020	47,973	7,705,281
Percent change, 2020 to 2021	-0.2%	0.4%

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 10.7 percent in 2020 compared to the state's 15.9 percent. Diversity in the county is near state averages.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Demographics

	Whitman County	Washington state
Population by age, 2021		
Under 5 years old	4.1%	6.0%
Under 18 years old	15.0%	21.8%
65 years and older	10.7%	15.9%
Females, 2021	49.1%	49.9%
Race/ethnicity, 2021		
White	83.8%	78.5%
Black	2.4%	4.4%
American Indian, Alaskan Native	0.9%	1.9%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, & other Pacific Islander	8.7%	10.4%
Hispanic or Latino, any race	6.5%	13.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Educational attainment

According to Census estimates, for the period 2016 to 2020 in Whitman County, 95.6 percent of individuals aged 25 and older were high school graduates, which was much higher than that of Washington state (91.7 percent).

An estimated 48.2 percent of people in Whitman County 25 and older have attained a bachelor's degree or higher. This figure compares favorably with the state (36.7 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](#)

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