

# A Look at Washington Agriculture



## Washington

Capital: Olympia  
Population: 6,587,600  
Founded: November 11, 1889 (42<sup>nd</sup> state)  
State Bird: Willow goldfinch  
State Tree: Western hemlock  
State Flower: Coast rhododendron  
Number of Counties: 39  
Largest City: Seattle Population: 592,800

### Climate



- Washington has several different climate zones which is a reason this state produces such a wide variety of crops.
- The westerly winds from the Pacific Ocean place this area in the Maritime climate zone and help to keep the western side of the state cool during the summer and warmer in the winter. Rainfall in the lowlands averages 40" each year.
- Washington has a rain forest in the Olympic Mountains where more than 140" of precipitation falls annually.
- The Cascade Mountains divide the state and prevent much of the coastal moisture from getting to the east side of the state. The world record for the most snowfall in one season (1140") occurred on Mt. Baker in the WA Cascades in the winter of 1998-99.
- Much of Eastern Washington is in the Steppe climate zone. It has hot summers and cold winters. Because of the rain shadow of the Cascade Mountains, average rainfall is only 10-20". There is also a Desert climate zone in central Washington where rainfall is less than 10" per year.

### Crops



- Washington ranks 12th in the nation in terms of total agricultural cash receipts, but is second only to California in the diversity of crops grown (about 230 different ones).
- Washington's highest dollar crop is apples. This state produces 57% of all the apples in the nation at a farmgate value of \$1.75 billion.
- Milk is the second most valuable agricultural commodity, followed by wheat, potatoes, and cattle and calves.
- Washington leads the nation in the production of several crops: 92% of all raspberries are raised here, 77% of all hops, 75% of the nation's supply of spearmint oil, 51% of sweet cherries, 46% of concord grapes, 46% of pears, 41% of all peppermint oil, and 38% of all prunes and plums.
- Other crops grown include: barley, alfalfa hay, corn, lentils, onions, wine grapes, apricots, peaches, canola, garbanzo beans, blueberries, aquaculture, forest products, and many varieties of vegetable seed.

### Soil



- Soils in Washington are as varied as the climate zones, from rich loam in valleys to desert sand, and have been created from volcanoes, floods, and wind.
- From 6-17 million years ago a long series of enormous volcanic eruptions built the Columbia Plateau. There is an estimated 42,000 cubic miles of basalt deposited in this area. No basalt eruptions remotely comparable in volume have happened anywhere in the world (average depth is 3000-3500 feet).
- Much of Eastern Washington is known as 'channeled scablands'. About 40 times, between 12 and 18,000 years ago, the Continental glaciers receded and caused ice dams on the Clark Fork River at the Idaho/Montana border to break. This flushed the land with water from Lake Missoula. These flows have been estimated at 10 times the combined flows of all the rivers in the world and raged to the Pacific Ocean in less than 48 hours. These floods scraped the land down to bedrock. Giant boulders imbedded in ice were carried as far as the Willamette Valley, south of Portland, Oregon.
- Receding glaciers across the state scraped topsoil and created huge valleys and many rivers and streams. Tons of fertile soil washed down from mountains and settled into the fertile flood plains.
- The soils from the Palouse region in SE Washington were built up from fine materials carried by the wind, creating giant soil dunes with extremely deep, fertile topsoil.

### General



- Central Washington is a desert, yet is considered the most productive agricultural land in the state, all because of irrigation. Grand Coulee dam was built in 1941 for irrigation purposes, with the sale of hydro-electric power as the means to pay for the project. The first half of the Columbia Basin Irrigation Project has made the desert bloom over half a million acres.
- Farmland covers about 35% of the state with a total of about 33,000 farms, averaging 458 acres per farm. 15,000 farms are irrigated. Total acres in production is approximately 15, 100,000.
- Farm products, especially grain, can be barged from as far inland as Lewiston, Idaho to terminals at Portland, OR for transport around the world. Six deep water ports in Western Washington offer a trade advantage, especially to other countries on the Pacific Rim.

### Animals



- Over one million cattle live in Washington, 243,000 of these are dairy cows.
- As human population grows in the Puget Sound area of Western Washington, dairy farms are shifting to the Columbia Basin and Yakima Valley in Eastern Washington.
- Lacking in-state processing facilities, production of hogs is limited.
- Washington also produces oysters, mussels, clams, geoducks, and trout.



### Washington Agriculture in the Classroom

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