



# A Look at *Washington* Agriculture

Capital: Olympia

Population: 7,797,095

Founded: November 11, 1889 (42<sup>nd</sup>)

State Bird: Willow Goldfinch

State Tree: Western Hemlock

State Flower: Coast Rhododendron

Number of Counties: 39

Largest City: Seattle - 767,000

Nickname: Evergreen State

Number of Farms: 35,700

Average Farm Size: 412 acres

Total Farmland: 14.7 million acres



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## Climate & Soil

- 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.
- 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.

## Crops & Livestock

- 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 65% of all the apples in the nation at a farmgate value of \$2.19 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: 85% of red raspberries for processing, 73% of all hops, 68% of the nation's supply of spearmint oil, 71% of sweet cherries, 46% of concord grapes, 49% of pears, 25% of all peppermint oil, and 70% of all wrinkled seed peas.
- 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.
- Washington also produces oysters, mussels, clams, geoducks, and trout.

## 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.