

Agriculture Sector Recovery Program

Washington State University Extension

Project Description

Thurston County farmers are experiencing disruptions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Labor shortages in crop production, livestock production, and the meat processing industries have emerged as prevailing challenges facing farmers and the agriculture sector.

Pandemic related job loss in Thurston County was evaluated utilizing the latest available labor market information. Compared to pre-pandemic levels, jobs in

- Crop production has declined by 10.7% from 1,509 to 1,236;
- Livestock production and aquaculture by 10.5% from 729 to 627; and
- Animal slaughter and processing by 9.8% from 67 to 60.

This project is a workforce recovery effort focused on recruiting and developing talent, subsidizing worker wages for employers, expanding knowledge of agriculture related career pathways in the county, and supporting Thurston County's long-term recovery by investing in and developing talent for this priority sector.

Project Time Period

The project will run over 24 months from 2022 to 2024, with reporting completed no later than September 30th, 2024. Worker recruitment and placement will begin in the summer of 2022. Employer wage support will be approximately 12-months based upon placement. The length of the program is designed to allow employers to adequately integrate new employees into their operations with maximum benefit during peak labor need, summers of 2022/23 through winter 2023, and allow for completion of program reporting in 2024.

Eligibility and Employer Selection

All agricultural employers directly engaged in crop production, livestock production, shellfish, and animal slaughter and processing are eligible to participate in the program. Employers will be prioritized on a first-come, first-served basis and registered by the coordinator team consisting of program leads at Washington State University (WSU) Ext and Pacific Mountain Workforce Development Council (PacMtn). Payroll reimbursements are at 50% of total wages up to 12 months but are capped at \$20,000 per employer. To maximize benefit, these funds can apply to one or more employee or production season, so long as they do not exceed the cap or program timeframe.

The program is open to all employers located in Thurston County, within the three recognized industry subcategories, and in operation prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Project Management

WSU Extension will lead the project, with PacMtn serving as the fiscal sponsor, and Thurston County EDC providing direct employer connectivity. This collaboration has key points of alignment within the county:

- The partnership brings together employers, training providers, and talent pools
- Leverages farm employment as an entry-level opportunity
- WorkSource System integration that connects ready to work talent to quality employment opportunities
- Development of food production career pathway resources that can be used as talent development pipelines for employers and recruitment resources for outreach
- Wages subsidized focused on OJT opportunities at \$18-\$21/hour
- Intentional outreach efforts to English as a second language and immigrant populations

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Project Outcomes

- 35 job seekers placed in employment @ or above \$40k (annually), with
- \$20K in wage subsidizes for 35 employers, with following job creation targets
 - 15 crop production
 - 15 livestock production
 - 5 meat processing
- Career Pathway development for crop production, livestock production, and meat processing
- Promotion of careers in agriculture and food production, a priority sector for Thurston County and the region
- Durable asset map for long-term worker recovery and occupational growth in the sector
- Integration into the WorkSource System for long term sustainability and priority focus

Roles and Responsibilities

- **WSU:** Project oversight, career pathway development, and employer engagement and technical support
- **PacMtn:** Fiscal management and employer wage disbursements, job seeker outreach and support, and WorkSource System integration
- **Thurston County EDC:** Sector engagement and marketing

Proposed Budget

• Wage reimbursement for Employers	\$	740,000
• Workforce training (credential/tuition)	\$	80,000
• Ag sector outreach and marketing to job seekers	\$	35,000
• Employer technical assistance (skill development and technical support)	\$	60,000
• Employer contract management	\$	85,000
Total	\$	1,000,000

Proposed Budget

Budget item	Direct	Indirect	
• Wage reimbursement for Employers	\$ 740,000	\$ 0	\$ 740,000
• Workforce training (credential/tuition)	\$ 80,000	\$ 0	\$ 80,000
• Ag sector outreach and marketing to job seekers	\$ 35,000	\$ 0	\$ 35,000
• Employer technical assistance (skill development and technical support)	\$ 47,482	\$ 12,518	\$ 60,000
• Employer contract management	\$ 0	\$ 85,000	\$ 85,000
Total			\$ 1,000,000