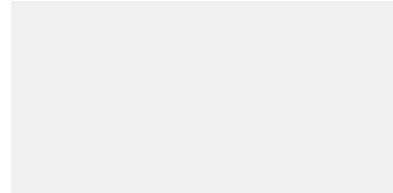


# Yakima County Profile

by Don Meseck, regional labor economist  
Updated January 2016



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## Overview

### *Regional context*

Yakima County is located in south central Washington state among seven neighboring counties. The geography varies from densely timbered, mountainous terrain in the west, rolling foothills, broad valleys and arid regions to the east and fertile valleys in its central and southern parts. Agriculture has been the staple of the economy over the last 100 years.

According to the Yakima County Economic Profile published by the Yakima County Development Association's New Vision office, Yakima is the second largest county in Washington state at 2.75 million acres. Three entities own 63.4 percent of this total:

- The Yakama Nation (1,074,174 acres)
- The US Forest Service (503,726 acres)
- The Yakima Training Center (165,787 acres)

Yakima County was separated from Kittitas County in 1883. Yakima County's development was shaped largely by the Northern Pacific Railroad and the Yakima River. Most of the county's population is concentrated along this river, largely because irrigation was critical to the success of the communities and the farmers who settled in this area.

The Washington Legislature passed the State Fair Act in 1893 and designated North Yakima in Yakima County as the site for an annual State Agricultural Fair. Some say it was a consolation prize for Yakima which lost its bid to Olympia to be named the state capital.

## Local economy

Yakima settlers developed the land into a commercial agricultural enterprise in the 1880s. With irrigation and railroads, commercial fruit production flourished. Yakima established wine grape vineyards in 1869 and hops acreage in 1872, which remain major parts of its agricultural industry today. Forestry and livestock, dairies and the growing, storage and shipping/processing of deciduous tree fruits (cherry, pears, apples, etc.), are bedrocks of Yakima County's economy.

In terms of jobs provided, agriculture is certainly the "big kid on the block" in Yakima County. The two other local industries in second and third place in terms of employment are health services and local government. Specifically, on an average annual basis in 2014, agricultural employers provided 29,331 jobs, or 27.5 percent of total covered employment countywide. Health services provided 15,456 jobs, or 14.5 percent; and local government averaged 12,896 jobs, or 12.1 percent of total employment. Hence, these three industries/sectors, accounted for 54.1 percent of total covered employment in the County in 2014.

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## Geographic facts

(Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts)

	Yakima County	Rank in state
Land area, 2010 (square miles)	4,295.4	2
Persons per square mile, 2010	56.6	16

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## Outlook

The Yakima County labor market added approximately 1,400 nonfarm jobs between 2013 and 2014, an average annual increase of 1.8 percent. The most recent labor force and nonfarm employment data available at the time of report preparation is for November 2015 and these data show that, on a monthly basis, Yakima County's nonfarm employment registered year over year increases for the 36-month period from December 2012 through November 2015. However, the growth pace slackened somewhat recently - from 3.3 percent in June 2015 to 1.1 percent in November 2015. Yakima County's nonfarm market provided 82,700 jobs in November 2015 versus 81,800 in the corresponding month in 2014, a 900 job and 1.1 percent upturn.

In comparison, between 2013 and 2014, Washington's labor market provided 81,000 new nonfarm jobs, an annual average increase of 2.7 percent. The state's economy also posted year-over-year nonfarm employment increases for the 62-month period from October 2010 through November 2015. The most current nonfarm employment estimate show that in November 2015,

businesses and government organizations across Washington supplied 3,203,800 nonfarm jobs (not seasonally adjusted) compared to 3,126,300 jobs in November 2014, a 2.5 percent year-over-year employment increase.

Recent trends for the Yakima County's nonfarm labor market:

- Annual average job growth during 2014 was less robust in Yakima County (1.8 percent) than in Washington state (2.7 percent).
- Nonfarm growth has a longer "growth streak" in the state versus in the county. Washington's nonfarm market has been growing for 62 consecutive months while Yakima County's nonfarm market has been growing for 36 consecutive months.
- In each of the most recent five months, for which data are available, nonfarm growth has been slower countywide than statewide (from July through November 2015).

Long-term (i.e. ten-year) industry employment projections produced by the Employment Security Department are for a 1.6 percent average annual growth rate from 2013-2023 for the four-county South Central WDA (i.e., Kittitas, Klickitat, Skamania and Yakima) and for a 1.8 percent growth rate for Washington state.

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## Labor force and unemployment

*(Source: Employment Security Department)*

Current labor force and unemployment statistics are available on the [Labor area summaries page](#).

Unemployment rates in Yakima County were remarkably consistent in the four-year period from 2005 to 2008 (before the recession). Rates ranged from a low of 6.3 percent in 2007 to a high of 7.4 percent in 2005. This was a relatively narrow range. During the recession however, unemployment rates in Yakima County increased to 10.6 percent in 2010 and in 2011 before decreasing to 9.0 percent in 2014.

Between 2013 and 2014 in Yakima County:

- Not seasonally adjusted unemployment declined from 10.0 to 9.0 percent, a one percentage point contraction. In comparison, Washington state's unemployment rate decreased eight-tenths of a point (from 7.0 percent in 2013 to 6.2 percent in 2014).
- The average number of unemployed fell from 11,932 to 10,755, equating to 1,177 fewer residents out of work in the county area during 2014. Also, the civilian labor force (CLF) rose by 623, from 118,788 to 119,411 residents, a 0.5 percent decrease. This was good economic news as it likely indicates that some discouraged workers rejoined the labor force in Yakima County in 2014. It could also indicate that more baby boomers were

delaying retirement (and remaining in the labor force), fewer residents are attending college on a full time basis, or fewer residents are claiming disabilities.

Although Yakima County's CLF increased 0.5 percent in 2014 and the local labor force registered year-over-year growth for 12 consecutive months (from August 2014 through July 2015); growth rates vacillated for the last four reportable months, from August through November 2015 (at the time this profile was prepared). Specifically, the local labor force: decreased 0.5 percent between the Augusts of 2014 and 2015, increased 0.9 percent between the Septembers of 2014 and 2015, decreased 0.1 percent between the Octobers of 2014 and 2015, and increased by 0.9 percent between the Novembers of 2014 and 2015. Suffice it to say that local labor force growth has been on-gain, off-again for the last four months.

When evaluating recent labor force trends in Yakima County, it is also helpful to look at the bigger picture (i.e., what's going on in Washington state). There is also some concern here. Although Washington's Civilian Labor Force (CLF) expanded by 28,145 residents (a 0.8 percent upturn) from 2013 to 2014 and the labor force increased, year over year, for the past 22 months (February 2014 through November 2015), the growth pace slowed to less than one percent in each of the most recent four months (August through November 2015). Please note that the state's labor force expanded in the 2.0- to 2.5-percent range in each month during the 1st Quarter of 2015. But, by November 2015 the CLF advanced only 0.5 percent above the same month one-year prior. Specifically, in November 2015 Washington's CLF tallied 3,527,516 residents versus 3,511,195 in November 2014 equating to 16,321 more Washingtonians in the labor force (up 0.5 percent). This is important because the Yakima County labor market is simply not isolated from statewide economic trends. Hence, this is a development that bears watching.

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## Industry employment

*(Source: Employment Security Department)*

Current industry employment statistics are available on the [Labor area summaries page](#).

The analysis in the first part of this "Industry employment" section is derived primarily from Quarterly Benchmarked (WA-QB) data. One advantage of these data is that the employment information is very current and data are updated monthly using WA\_QB employment estimates. However, estimates are nonfarm related (i.e., they do not include agricultural employment figures).

The analysis in the second part of this "Industry employment" section are derived from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Quarterly Census of Employment and Wage (QCEW) program, conducted by the Washington State Employment Security Department. Although it takes a little longer to acquire QCEW data (than WA-QB data), the economic information provided is broader and more detailed than that provided by WA-QB. First, QCEW includes employment, wage, and size of firm figures for the agricultural sector, which WA-QB does not include. Second, QCEW

data provide employment, wage and size of firm figures for businesses and government organizations in Yakima County down to the 3-digit NAICS sub-sector level (i.e., more detail than WA-QB). QCEW data include agricultural and nonagricultural employment and wages for firms, organizations and individuals whose employees are covered by the Washington State Employment Security Act. Also included are data for Federal Government agencies covered by Title 5, U.S.C. 85. Covered employment generally exceeds 85 percent of total employment in the state of Washington. Types of jobs not covered under the unemployment compensation system and hence not included in QCEW data include casual laborers not performing duties in the course of the employer's trade or business; railroad personnel; newspaper delivery people; insurance or real estate agents paid on a commission basis only; non-covered employees working for parochial schools, religious, or non-profit organizations; employees of sheltered workshops; inmates working in penal institutions; non-covered corporate officers; etc.

Analysis using Quarterly Benchmarked data:

Although the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) announced that the national recession occurred from December 2007 through June 2009, the effects of this recession hit the Yakima County labor market primarily in 2009 and 2010. Nonfarm employment in Yakima County peaked at an average of 79,600 jobs in 2008, then the recession hit. Since this recession, total nonfarm employment in Yakima County:

- Dropped by 1.9 percent in 2009 (down 1,500 jobs) to an average annual figure of 78,100. If there was any consolation to the dismal performance of the local economy in 2009, it was that the state's nonfarm market fared even worse – falling by 4.3 percent between 2008 and 2009.
- Ebbed by 0.4 percent (down 300 jobs) to an average annual figure of 77,800 during 2010. In relative terms, Washington state's economy fared worse as the number of nonfarm jobs declined 0.9 percent between 2009 and 2010.
- Rebounded by 0.4 percent (up 300 jobs) to 78,100 jobs in 2011. By this time however, the state's recovery was underway, expanding 1.3 percent between 2010 and 2011.
- Slipped backwards 0.6 percent in 2012 (down 500 jobs) to 77,600. Conversely, Washington's nonfarm economy moved upwards by 1.7 percent between 2011 and 2012.
- Regained its footing in 2013 by growing 1.0 percent (up 800 jobs) to 78,400. The tempo of job growth improved statewide as well. Washington's nonfarm market averaged 2.4 percent more nonfarm jobs in 2013 than in 2012.
- Advanced by 1.8 percent (up 1,400 jobs) to 79,800. Approximately 78.6 percent of this nonfarm growth occurred in: construction, wholesale trade, health services, and food services. It took six years for the Yakima County economy to get back to the 2008 nonfarm employment peak of 79,800 jobs. But it finally did so with this "strong finish" (up 1.8 percent) in 2014, assisted of course by modest average annual upturns in 2013 (up 1.0 percent) and in 2011 (up 0.4 percent).

Using the most current monthly WA-QB data, Yakima County's employment has registered year over year increases for the past 36 consecutive months (December 2012 through November 2015). However, the growth pace has slackened a bit during the past five months - from 3.3 percent in June 2015 to 1.1 percent this November. The local nonfarm market provided 82,700

jobs in November 2015 versus 81,800 in the corresponding month in 2014, a 900 job and 1.1 percent upturn.

Between 2013 and 2014, Washington's labor market provided 81,000 new nonfarm jobs, an average annual increase of 2.7 percent which was faster than Yakima County's 1.8 percent average annual upturn during this period. In November 2015, businesses and government organizations across Washington supplied 3,223,600 nonfarm jobs (not seasonally adjusted), compared to 3,134,600 jobs in November 2014, a 2.5 percent year-over-year employment increase. The state's economy has posted year-over-year nonfarm employment increases for the past 62 consecutive months (October 2010 through November 2015). Hence, one could generalize that not only has the state's economy been growing longer than the county's (62-versus 36 consecutive months of year-over-year nonfarm job growth) but the pace of job growth during the "recovery" has been more robust in Washington state than in Yakima County.

Analysis using QCEW data:

The North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) is an industry classification system that groups businesses/organizations into categories or sectors based on the activities in which they are primarily engaged. There are 19 private sectors and three government sectors (for a total of 22 sectors) at the 2-digit NAICS code level, within each county-level economy. One can observe much about the structure of a county's economy by quantifying and comparing the number of jobs and the percentage of jobs in these sectors by using annual average Quarterly Census of Employment and Wage (QCEW) data. The most recent average annual employment data available for Yakima County are for 2014 and these data show:

The top five Yakima County sectors in 2014 in terms of employment were:

Sector	Number of jobs	Share of employment
1. Agriculture, forestry and fishing	29,331	27.5%
2. Health Services	15,456	14.5%
3. Local government	12,896	12.1%
4. Retail trade	10,103	9.5%
5. Manufacturing	8,216	7.7%
Total covered employment	106,613	100%
All other industries	30,611	28.7%

More than seventy percent (71.3 percent, to be exact) of all jobs in Yakima County were in five, two-digit NAICS industries or sectors (i.e., agriculture, health services, local government, retail trade and manufacturing). A comparison of the top five sectors that provided the most jobs in Yakima County in 2014 with the sectors that produced the highest payrolls follows:

- Agriculture provided 27.5 percent of all jobs countywide, but supplied only 21.0 percent of total wage income. Why? Many agricultural jobs are seasonal.

- Conversely, health services tallied 14.5 percent of total covered employment but accounted for 16.0 percent of total wage income – indicating it is a relatively “good paying” industry.
- Local government provided 12.1 percent of total covered employment but accounted for 14.9 percent of total wage income – indicating, as in health services, that this is a relatively “good paying” industry. Jobs with local public school districts (primary and secondary schools) are tallied under the local government category.
- The local retail trade sector accounted for 9.5 percent of all jobs in the county, but only 7.5 percent of total wage income.
- Manufacturing (with many jobs in the food processing industry) provided 7.7 percent of all jobs in Yakima County, but accounted for 9.4 percent of total wage income.

If one analyzes employment changes in Yakima County over the past eleven years (2004-2014) using Washington State Employment Security Department’s annual average Quarterly Census of Employment and Wage (QCEW) data the following employment trends emerge:

In Yakima County, total covered employment increased from 93,988 in 2004 to 106,613 in 2014, a 12,625 job and 13.4 percent expansion during this ten-year period. Of the 22 NAICS sectors mentioned earlier, there were five major sectors/industries that accounted for 65.4 percent of all jobs countywide in 2004. The same “Top Five” accounted for 71.3 percent of all covered employment countywide ten years later, in 2014. Hence, the Yakima County economy was not a tremendously diverse economy in 2004, and QCEW employment data indicate it has become even less diverse by 2014. In 2014; agriculture provided 27.5 percent, health services 14.5 percent, local government 12.1 percent, retail trade 9.5 percent and manufacturing 7.7 percent of total covered employment countywide. In 2004; agriculture provided 21.3 percent, local government 13.0 percent, health services 11.6 percent, manufacturing 9.8 percent, and retail trade 9.8 percent of total covered employment. Hence, there was some repositioning in the “Top Five” rankings of job-providing sectors during this most recent ten-year period, as follows:

- Employment in agriculture, forestry and fishing (where the vast majority are in agriculture) jumped 46.2 percent (from 20,057 jobs in 2004 to 29,331 in 2014) as agriculture strengthened its “Number One” position during this ten-year period.
- Local government registered a modest 5.6 percent upturn (from 12,209 jobs in 2004 to 12,896 in 2014) but it moved downwards in the “Top Five” ranking; from the second largest industry employment-wise in 2004 to the “Number Three” position in 2014.
- Health services posted a dynamic 41.6 percent expansion (from 10,914 jobs in 2004 to 15,456 in 2014) improving its ranking from the third largest industry countywide in 2004 to the “Number Two” position in 2014.
- Manufacturing employment in Yakima County decreased 10.5 percent (from 9,181 jobs in 2004 to 8,216 in 2014) and this sector/industry slipped from the “Number Four” to the “Number Five” position in the “Top Five” rankings between 2004 and 2014. Why? Durable goods manufacturing took some hits in the decade from 2000-2010. Layoffs were particularly severe in transportation equipment manufacturing (i.e., closures at Chinook Trailwagons and Western RV) and in lumber and wood products (i.e. the Yakima Resources closure). Nondurable goods manufacturing was not immune to layoffs either and food processing shed jobs when DelMonte closed their asparagus cannery in

Toppenish. Another negative economic event which depressed food processing employment in Yakima County was the July 1, 2008 fire which destroyed the Wild River Foods potato processing plant in Grandview. According to a July 2, 2008 article in the Yakima Herald Republic, this fire “destroyed a large chunk of Grandview’s economy . . . taking with it about 150 jobs.” However, annual QCEW employment data show that although Yakima County’s manufacturers “troughed” at 7,470 jobs in 2010, this subsector has generally been on an uptrend since then. Specifically, manufacturing employment rose to 7,869 in 2011, ebbed to 7,813 in 2012, expanded to 8,222 in 2014, but virtually stalled at 8,216 jobs in 2014. These data indicate a slow, but not steady, resurgence in Yakima County’s manufacturing employment since 2010. Following are examples of some manufacturing subsectors that have shown promise in recent years:

- Plastics and rubber product manufacturing (NAICS 326) escalated modestly from 1,336 jobs in 2013 to 1,369 in 2014, a 33 job and 2.5 percent upturn.
- Fabricated metal product manufacturing (NAICS 332) dipped from 872 jobs in 2013 to 871 in 2014, a loss of one job. However, in 2009 the number of fabricated metal product manufacturing jobs bottomed out in Yakima County at 674, but this subsector has generally been in a growth mode ever since. In 2010 it accounted for 721 jobs, in 2011 it provided 769 jobs, in 2012 employment fell to 723, but it jumped up to 872 jobs in 2013 and virtually stabilized in 2014 at 871. Clearly, this is a manufacturing subsector that has established a niche here in the county.
- Machinery manufacturing (NAICS 333) progressed from 573 jobs in 2013 to 602 in 2014, a 29 job and 5.1 percent average annual employment gain.
- Transportation equipment manufacturing (NAICS 336) slipped from 614 jobs in 2013 to 605 in 2014, a 9 job and 1.5 percent downtrend. However, the number of transportation equipment manufacturing jobs bottomed out in Yakima County at 380 in 2010 and this subsector has generally been in a growth mode ever since. In 2011 it provided 494 jobs, in 2012 employment rose to 569, and in 2013 this subsector rallied to 614.
- Retail trade employment increased 10.5 percent (from 9,145 jobs in 2004 to 10,103 in 2014) raising its ranking from the fifth-largest job providing industry countywide in 2004 to the “Number Four” position in 2014.

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

### *Industry employment by age and gender*

*(Source: The Local Employment Dynamics)*

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. Some highlights:



In 2014, women held 48.7 percent of the jobs in Yakima County. However, there were substantial differences in gender by industry.

- Male-dominated industries included utilities (83.8 percent), construction (83.5 percent) and mining (82.9 percent).
- Female-dominated industries included healthcare and social assistance (79.7 percent), finance and insurance (71.0 percent) and educational services (68.3 percent).

There were differences in 2014 between Yakima County and Washington state in the percentages of workers by age class:

- 6.4 percent of workers in Yakima County in all industries were age 14 to 21 versus 5.5 percent statewide.
- 24.9 percent of workers in Yakima County in all industries were 55 years of age or older versus 22.6 percent statewide.

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## Wages and income

*(Source: Employment Security Department; Bureau of Labor Statistics; Bureau of Economic Analysis; U.S. Census Bureau; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey)*

The total covered payroll in 2014 in Yakima County was approximately \$3.69 billion. The average annual wage was \$34,628 or 63.0 percent of the state average of \$55,003.

The top five Yakima County industries in 2014 in terms of payrolls were:

Sector	Payroll	Share of payrolls
1. Agriculture, forestry and fishing	\$775,183,033	21.0%
2. Health services	\$592,111,640	16.0%
3. Local government	\$548,775,275	14.9%
4. Manufacturing	\$347,502,709	9.4%
5. Retail trade	\$276,141,632	7.5%
Total covered payrolls	\$3,691,830,463	100%
All other industries	\$1,152,116,174	31.2%

As shown in the table above, QCEW data showed that Yakima County's workers received \$3.69 billion in wages in calendar year 2014. Over two-thirds of this wage income was earned in five, two-digit NAICS industries or sectors (i.e., agriculture, health services, local government, agriculture, manufacturing and retail trade). Agriculture was the largest provider of wages and jobs in the county in 2014, supplying 21.0 percent of total earned wage income and accounting for 27.5 percent of all jobs. The disparity in percentages between wages and employment is

primarily due to the fact that there is a relatively high proportion of seasonal jobs in the agricultural sector. Private health services (i.e. jobs at a doctor/dentist's office, in a hospital, nursing home, vocational rehab facility, etc.) ranked second out of 22 industries in terms of wages, providing \$592.1 million in payroll and accounting for 16.0 percent of total earned wage income countywide. Health services also registered 14.5 percent of total covered employment in 2014, indicating that this is a relatively good paying industry.

Annual average wages in 2014 were highest in utilities (\$78,809) and in management of companies and enterprises (\$68,439). Conversely, annual average wages were lowest in accommodation and food services (\$15,362) and in arts, entertainment and recreation (\$19,992).

### *Personal income*

Personal income includes earned income, investment income, and government payments such as Social Security and Veterans Benefits. Investment income includes income imputed from pension funds and from owning a home. Per capita personal income equals total personal income divided by the resident population.

Per capita income in Yakima County in 2014 was \$37,630 compared to the state at \$49,610 and the nation at \$46,049.

Median household income in 2014 was \$43,956 in Yakima County, only 72.9 percent of the state's median income (\$60,294) and the nation's (\$53,482).

Yakima County's poverty rate in 2014 was considerably higher (20.5 percent) than the state's (13.2 percent) and the nation's (14.8 percent) poverty rates. The state and national rates are not directly comparable to the county rate because they each use different data sources.

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## **Population**

*(Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Office of Financial Management )*

During the last ten years, Yakima County had an annual average population growth rate of about 0.8 percent, which was slower than Washington's 1.1 percent growth pace.

Yakima County's population was estimated at 247,687 in 2014, up 1.8 percent from the 243,231 county residents in 2010. Washington's state's population grew 5.0 percent, to 7,061,530 residents in 2014 from 6,724,543 in 2010. Hence the local population grew a little less than one-third as fast as the state's population during the past four years.

During the next ten years (2015 through 2024) Yakima County's population is estimated to grow annually by 1.0 percent, while the state should continue to expand at a similar yearly clip of 1.0 percent.

## Population facts

(Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts)

	Yakima County	Washington state
Population 2014	247,687	7,061,530
Population 2010	243,231	6,724,543
Percent change, 2010 to 2014	1.8%	5.0%

## Age, gender and ethnicity

(Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts)

Compared with the state, Yakima County's 2014 population has substantially more children under 5 years old and more youth under 18 years old. Nearly 30.0 percent of the county's residents are under 18 years old compared to 22.7 percent statewide. The county's population age 65 or older totals 12.8 percent compared to 14.1 percent in Washington state.

Yakima County has a higher percentage of Latino and Hispanic residents than the state and nation. In 2014, only 45.0 percent of its residents were white, not Hispanic or Latino, much lower than the statewide average (70.4 percent). Yakima County's Hispanic or Latino population makes up 47.7 percent of its population, much higher than Washington state (12.2 percent). Yakima County's American Indian/Native Alaskan population was 6.0 percent compared to 1.9 percent in the state, which reflects the presence of the Yakama Nation.

## Demographics

(Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts)

	Yakima County	Washington state
Population by age, 2014		
Under 5 years old	8.4%	6.3%
Under 18 years old	29.8%	22.7%
65 years and older	12.8%	14.1%
Females, 2014	49.9%	50.0%
Race/ethnicity, 2014		
White, not Hispanic or Latino	45.0%	70.4%
Black	1.5%	4.1%
American Indian, Alaskan Native	6.0%	1.9%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, Other Pacific Islander	1.7%	8.9%
Hispanic or Latino, any race	47.7%	12.2%

## *Educational attainment*

*(Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts)*

According to the American Community Survey, during the period 2010 to 2014, 71.5 percent of Yakima County's population 25 years and older were high school graduates or higher. This figure is considerably lower than the statewide average of 90.2 percent and the national average of 86.3 percent.

Yakima County also had a lower percentage of adults with a bachelor's degree or higher (15.9 percent) compared to the state at 32.3 percent and the nation at 29.3 percent during the same time period.

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