



Pat Burnett holds some Bartlett pears. He says this year's Bartlett crop is among the best he's seen in the Wenatchee Valley.

Labor

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a week off before a month of harvesting d'Anjou pears. At that point, they'll need 10 to 15 more pickers.

A sign in Spanish seeking pickers was tacked to empty pear bins at the neighboring Christensen family orchard. Manager Pablo Avila said he has 60 pickers and needs 30 more to harvest 30 acres of Bartlett and 350 acres of d'Anjou.

The picker shortage is about the same it's been for the last couple of years, he said. It's manageable, harvest just takes three to four days longer, he said. Pay is \$23 per bin plus a \$1 per bin bonus for staying the season.

Piece rates vary by variety and a grower's need, but mostly are in the \$20s per bin, Gempler said. They reach \$30 per bin for some premium apple varieties, he said.

"I think more people are using end-of-season bonuses trying to find incentives to keep people," he said.

Cell phones make it hard to keep people because pickers learn quickly of better conditions or better pay and quit



Misael Hernandez, 22, is a fast Bartlett picker at Burnett Orchards near Cashmere, Wash., on Aug. 15.

where they are working to go there, Gempler said. It increases the workload on growers, who must keep track of whom they owe for how many hours when pickers return on pay day.

Fruit 'triage'

Growers do a lot of "triage" on which fruit to pick, and when.

"Most valuable crops come first and they hope they can come around and get the less valuable in time. They may sac-

rifice condition or even an entire crop because they don't have enough labor to pick everything on time. A lot of that happened last year and will this year," he said.

Paula McKay, manager and principal owner of Mar-Jon Labor in Othello, Wash., the region's largest labor contractor, provided 2,150 workers to growers last year.

McKay said she has enough workers for her clients now but

will struggle at the end of August and early September when many crops reach the peak of harvest. Her crews mostly weed row crops before working the apple, onion, potato and corn harvests.

In May of 2015, she was short weeders until she boosted their pay from the state minimum wage of \$9.47 per hour to \$11.

"Minimum wage hardly exists anymore," she said.



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14 Meridian FFA members attend Washington Leadership Conference



Meridian, Idaho, FFA members stand in front of the White House during the FFA Washington Leadership Conference. From left are Delaney Vatcher, Ashton Shaul, Kyle Schmit, Loretta Lacy, Lauren Barker, Mollie Hiscox, Cameron King, Ellie Higgins, Kiara Wetzel, Kaitlin Muniz, Lauren Jackson and Kate Johnson.

By Loretta Lacy
Meridian FFA Reporter

Fourteen Meridian FFA members got the chance to attend the Washington Leadership Conference from June 27 until July 3. They were Loretta Lacy, Mollie Hiscox, Lauren Barker, Kyle Schmit, Cameron King, Ashton Shaul, Delaney Vatcher, Kaitlin Muniz, Rachel Mansfield, Ellie Higgins, Kiara Wetzel, Lauren Jackson, and Kate Johnson and were accompanied by two advisors, Miss Kya Vines and Mrs. Trish Stokes.

The Washington Leadership Conference is a conference that FFA members from all 50 states can attend. It is held in Washington, D.C. This conference lasts a week, and eight weeks are offered each summer. All attendees stayed in the Omni Shoreham Hotel, where the conference sessions were held this year.

During our week of WLC, 348 FFA members from around the nation attended the conference. Members can only attend this conference once. Most attendees are going into their junior or senior year in high school.

Within the 348 members, we were split into Community Groups consisting of an average of 26 members. WLC puts an emphasis on leadership and serving your community. This conference focused on having each member create a "Living to Serve Plan" to help our community at home. We spent most of our community group meetings creating, organizing and planning.

In our large group meeting, consisting of all the attendees, we did lots of fun, but thought-provoking activities. We talked a lot about hunger in our communities and what we can do to help. On the last day of the conference, we made 6,200 macaroni-and-cheese bags for food shelters around the D.C. area through an organization called Meals for Hope.

Half of the conference consisted of sessions. For the other half, we spent it touring D.C. WLC attendees were privileged to visit the following:

- Holocaust Museum
- Washington Monument
- Jefferson Memorial
- White House
- JFK Memorial
- U.S. Capitol, where we visited Senator James Risch's office
- Korean War Memorial
- National Archives, where we saw the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence
- Lincoln Memorial
- National Zoo
- Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial
- Natural History Museum

Members from our chapter that attended this trip owe a great deal of gratitude to the Meridian FFA Alumni, Ada County Farm Bureau, Meridian Dairy Board, Meridian FFA Chapter and Dave and Angie Daniels for their financial donations to reduce the cost of the trip. With their help, the price of the trip per student was lowered from \$1,460 to \$650. All 14 of us are extremely thankful to have attended this great program at less than half the original cost.

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