JOBLESS

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Wallowa County's rate dropped from 5% to 4.6%. The county totals 167 unemployed, a decrease of 16. The county has 2,440 nonfarm jobs, a decrease of 20 from February.

In Umatilla County, the unemployment rate increased two-tenths of a point to 5.8%. It added 66 people to the unemployment rolls for a total of 2,209 for March. Umatilla County also added 120 to its nonfarm jobs for a total of 27,430.

According to the most recent Oregon Employment Department Job Vacancy Survey of private employers, the occupation with the most job openings in Eastern Oregon (Baker, Grant, Harney, Malheur, Morrow, Umatilla, Union and Wallowa counties) in 2020 was heavy truck and semitrailer drivers with 284, about 11% of the total vacancies within the region.

BY THE NUMBERS

Top 10 Eastern Oregon occupations with the highest number of job vacancies in 2020

Heavy truck and semitrailer drivers:	284
Personal care aides:	139
Packers and packagers:	107
Nursing assistants:	103
Farmworkers and laborers, crop, nursery and greenhouses:	102
Production workers, all other:	99
Retail salespersons:	98
Registered nurses:	81
Construction laborers:	60
Cooks, restaurants:	56
All occupations:	2,527

Source: Oregon Employment Department

Statewide, Oregon's unemployment rate shifted from 6.1% in February to 6% in March. For the past three months, according to the Employment Department, Oregon's unemployment rate has ticked down by one-tenth of a point each month.

During the past 11 months the pace of recovery in Oregon's unemployment rate has mirrored the national experience. The U.S. unemployment rate dropped to 6% in March, from 6.2% in February.

Nonfarm payroll employment rose 20,100 jobs in March, following a gain of 15,300, as revised, in February. Two-thirds of all the jobs gained in March were in leisure and hospitality (+13,900 jobs).

Three other major industries added more than 1,000 jobs each: manufacturing (+2,000 jobs); professional and business services (+1,300); and transportation, warehousing and utilities (+1,100). Construction and private educational services each added 700 jobs. All other major industries performed close to their normal seasonal patterns.

The addition of the 20,100 total nonfarm jobs in March was Oregon's largest monthly gain since July 2020, when the state added 38,300 jobs. March's gain was the third monthly increase, following a large drop in December that was the result of temporary, heightened restrictions at the time.

In March, Oregon's nonfarm payroll employment totaled 1,840,600, a drop of 132,400 jobs, or 6.7% from the pre-recession peak in February 2020. Oregon's employment dropped to a low of 1,687,500 by April 2020. Since then, Oregon has recovered 153,100 jobs, or 54% of the jobs lost between February and April 2020.

During the past year, the employment gyrations in leisure and hospitality have accounted for a large share of the swings in Oregon's total employment. This broad category includes restaurants, bars, coffee shops, hotels, golf courses and fitness centers.

The industry employed a peak of 216,300 workers in February 2020, which was 11% of total nonfarm payroll employment. Then, within two months, leisure and hospitality cut more than half its jobs. Since then, the industry has recovered about half the drop to employ 165,200 by November. Then came a new slew of COVID-19 restrictions, knocking the industry to 136,800 jobs in December.

Since then, the industry added 25,900 jobs and is close to its recent high point from last November, but it is still far below its February 2020 peak.

Get in on restaurant revitalization grant opportunities

GREG SMITH
SBDC

There is no doubt the restaurant industry has been particularly hard hit during the pandemic. As part of the American Recovery Plan, $28.5 billion has been used to establish a "restaurant revitalization fund."

When it was first announced, business owners were told they needed to obtain a DUNS number and they had to register in SAMS. However, on March 30, the Small Business Administration announced neither is the case, and restaurants will not be required to do so.

According to the National Restaurant Association, "Eligible businesses may receive a tax-free federal grant (does not have to be repaid) equal to the amount of its pandemic related losses, calculated by subtracting its 2020 gross receipts from its 2019 gross receipts. Those pandemic related revenue losses are reduced by any Paycheck Protection funds received."

Who is eligible?

- Restaurants
- Food stands
- Food carts
- Caterers
- Saloons, inns, bars, lounges, brewpubs, tasting rooms, taprooms, etc.

Applicants must submit a good faith certification that:

- They are applying because of the economic uncertainty and need support to continue operating.
- They have not applied for or received a Shuttered Venue grant for live venues.

Eligible expenses are:

- Payroll and paid sick leave
- Mortgage — principal or interest
- Rent
- Utilities
- Maintenance
- Construction for outdoor seating
- Supplies such as protective equipment and cleaning materials
- Regular food and beverage inventory
- Certain supplier costs
- Any other expenses SBA deems essential to maintaining operations

It's important to note that $5 billion is available to businesses with gross receipts of $500,000 or less during 2019. Once the grant is opened, priority will be given during the first 21 days to restaurants owned and operated by women veterans, or those considered socially or economically disadvantaged.

It is expected this fund's dollars will be dispersed very quickly and there is no indication as to whether the fund will be replenished. Businesses are encouraged to apply for other COVID-19 related programs including the PPP, of which President Biden just extended the deadline from March 31 to May 31. Visit www.sba.gov to apply for the PPP.

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Greg Smith is the director of the Eastern Oregon University Small Business Development Center, La Grande. If you are seeking free, confidential business advising, call 541-962-1532 or email eousbdc@gmail.com.

TAXES

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"Lawmakers developed these tax policies to encourage corporate taxpayers to make investments in economic growth, infrastructure and renewables," Duke spokesperson Catherine Butler said.

She said federal tax rules allowed Duke to delay some cash payments for taxes into the future, but not eliminate them. The company had about $9 billion in deferred tax liabilities at the end of 2020, which Butler said will become future tax payments over time.

Nike, meanwhile, used a federal tax credit meant to encourage corporate research and development. The athletic apparel giant also took tax benefits related to share-based compensation for its fiscal year that ended on May 31. Altogether, it received $109 million in federal tax rebates after reporting total pretax income of $2.9 billion for the year.

Officials at Nike, which is based in Beaverton, Oregon, could not be immediately reached for comment.

"Most CEOs of large, publicly trade corporations are not going to risk prison to get out of paying taxes when Congress provides them with so many legal ways to do so," said Steve Wamhoff, director of federal tax policy at the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy.

The $2.2 trillion rescue package that Washington approved last spring to ease the pain caused by the pandemic opened more avenues for companies to limit their federal tax bills. The law allowed corporations to take losses reported in 2018 through 2020 and use them to reduce tax liabilities from earlier years, even ones where income was taxed at higher rates.

"When President Trump signaled his intention to cut corporate taxes in 2017, he and Congress had an opportunity to pare back the many loopholes that have allowed companies to avoid tax on much of their income since the early 1980s," the authors of the report, Wamhoff and Matthew Gardner, wrote. "But now, with three years of data published on the effective tax rates paid by publicly traded companies, it is clear that the Trump law has not meaningfully curbed corporate tax avoidance and may even be encouraging it."

Corporations altogether paid nearly $243 billion in total tax receipts in 2019, down 30% from five years earlier.

A worker handles onions March 11, 2021, at Baker & Murakami Produce, Ontario. CEO Grant Kitamura says the company plans to pack and ship until about the start of May.

ONIONS

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disruptions shut down many restaurants.

The Nyssa company was forced to discard some 50 truckloads of onions at the end of last year's marketing season.

Demand and pricing for the crop grown in 2019 were excellent at the outset and then weakened, he said.

The 2020 crop had good demand in fall and holiday seasons. The market has been mostly steady in 2021.

USDA's Food box program "indirectly helped all of us," Riley said. For example, some customers filled food box orders with onions they bought from Snake River Produce.

High shipping costs and a tight supply of trucks and drivers challenge the industry, he said. Input costs and competition from non-U.S. onions increased in the past year.

Shay Myers, CEO at Owyhee Produce in Parma, Idaho, said Monday, April 12, the company likely will pack and ship local onions for another two to three weeks before shifting to California-grown supply. Prices have been at or slightly below the five-year average.

Idaho, Oregon and Washington produced a strong crop, "so out of the Northwest, we really shipped a lot of onions," Myers said. Quality is high.

"They were a different cocktail of customers" this year, he said. Owyhee Produce sold more onions into the retail segment.

Myers said it appears the increase in at-home consumption boosted total consumption, which was unexpected given pandemic-related closures and restrictions in the large foodservice sector.

Baker & Murakami Produce in Ontario, as of Monday planned to pack and ship onions for another two-and-a-half weeks, CEO Grant Kitamura said.

"It is not a stellar year in terms of marketing prices," he said. "But we shipped the product, which is good."

USDA April 12 reported a 50-pound sack of jumbo yellow onions from the Idaho-Oregon region sold for $6 to $7.50, mostly $6. Year-earlier prices were $5 to $6.

Shipments to date totaled 28,219, up from 24,572. A shipment is 400 cwt.