

## Agriculture and Natural Resources Sector

### Summary of key themes, needs, and opportunities: June 2024

Prepared by the Agriculture and Natural Resources Center of Excellence

**(1) What are the top 3-5 themes you hear from employers in your sector related to workforce development?** (2-3 sentences max for each statement)

- **Lack of Awareness Among Youth:** There is a lack of awareness among youth about the breadth of living wage job opportunities available in agriculture and natural resources, limiting their interest and engagement in these fields.
- **Critical Demand for Specific Roles:** Employers emphasize the urgent need for positions such as farmworkers, agronomists, crop advisors, and truck drivers, foresters, and conservation technicians.
- **Career Advancement Opportunities:** There are significant opportunities for career progression within agricultural roles, with employees often able to transition between departments, enhancing their skills and career prospects.
- **Educational and Skills Gaps:** A significant barrier is the lack of individuals with the necessary education and experience in fields such as agronomy, horticulture, and plant and soil sciences, leading to a limited pool of qualified candidates.
- **Geographical and Housing Barriers:** Recruitment efforts are hampered by limited access to affordable housing in rural areas and the remote locations of many agricultural and forestry operations, which deter potential candidates.

**(2a) What are the 3-6 occupations that employers in your sector indicate should be high-priority for workforce development to help meet their hiring needs?**

- Farm Worker
- Agronomist/Field Consultant
- Forester
- Conservation Tech
- Livestock Manager
- Animal Nutrition Specialist

**(2b) Which career connected learning programs are effectively meeting the hiring needs of employers in your sector?**

- **Washington State University:** Field Crop Management, Agriculture Technology and Production management
- **Walla Walla Community College** Certificate & Degree Options: Agriculture Education, Agriculture - Plant & Soil Science, Agricultural Systems\*, Agriculture Technology & Mgmt, Field Crop Mgmt, Food Science, Organic & Sustainable Agriculture, Viticulture Science
- **Columbia Basin College** Certificate & Degree Options: Agriculture Systems\*, Crop & Soil Science, Field Crop Management, Precision Agriculture

- **Wenatchee Valley College** Certificate & Degree Options: Hispanic Orchard Employee Education (HOEEP), Horticulture & Tree Fruit, Integrated Pest Mgmt, Sustainable & Organic Ag, Viticulture Sustainability
- **Western Washington University** – Sustainability Pathways Program (Twisp, WA location)
- **ESD 123** – High School to Highway CDL

**(2c) Which career connected learning programs could be adjusted, expanded, or scaled to other regions to meet the hiring needs of employers in your sector?**

- With the increasing demand for workers with a CDL, there is an opportunity to expand the **ESD 123 High School to Highway CDL program** to school districts across the state.
- **The Wenatchee Valley College programs**, including Hispanic Orchard Employee Education (HOEEP), Horticulture & Tree Fruit, Integrated Pest Management, Sustainable & Organic Agriculture, and Viticulture Sustainability, address critical workforce needs in Washington's agriculture sector. These programs equip students, particularly from underrepresented Hispanic communities, with specialized skills essential for modern, sustainable agricultural practices. Scaling these programs to other regions would enhance workforce readiness, promote sustainability, and support economic growth in Washington's agriculture industry.
- In regions throughout the state, there are schools providing **various career exploration opportunities** related to local industries. For instance, there's Wheat Week in the Mid-Columbia and East region, Salmon Summit in the Mid-Columbia region, and statewide programs like YESS and Microsoft's Farm Beats. With numerous valuable exploration opportunities already available, there's a desire to expand their reach.

**(2d) Which career connected learning programs should be developed to meet the hiring needs of employers in your sector?**

- In regions throughout the state, there are schools providing various career exploration opportunities related to local industries. For instance, there's Wheat Week in the Mid-Columbia and East region, Salmon Summit in the Mid-Columbia region, and statewide programs like YESS and Microsoft's Farm Beats. **With numerous valuable exploration opportunities already available, there's a desire to expand their reach.** For example, rather than just one 10th grade class in a particular district or region utilizing the YESS program, the aim is to involve 10th grade classes across the entire district or region in the program. This expansion would enable more students to benefit from these valuable career exploration opportunities. Feedback indicates that many students are still unaware of the wide range of career options available within the fields of agriculture and natural resources. It is imperative to generate interest in these areas before expanding launch programs to ensure their viability and attract significant enrollment.
- Integrate established (and develop new) frameworks related to agriculture and natural resources, such as those offered by the Pacific Education Institute (PEI), into **K-12 curriculum planning**. By aligning educational content with industry standards and best practices, educators can effectively introduce students to foundational concepts and skillsets essential for success in forestry/natural resources.
- Offer an **agriculture educator externship program** to provide teachers with immersive learning experiences in the agriculture sector. Through site visits, workshops, and networking

events, educators can gain firsthand knowledge of industry trends, emerging technologies, and career pathways, enriching their instructional practices and better preparing students for future success in the field.

**(3) What are the top 3-5 approaches you recommend to increase participation of underrepresented students in your sector's high priority occupations? (2-3 sentences max for each statement)**

- **Exposure Opportunities for Urban and Rural Learners:** Implement tailored career exploration and preparation initiatives such as career fairs, industry site tours, and informational sessions that address the unique experiences of both urban and rural students. Collaborate with schools, community organizations, and local businesses to provide hands-on exposure through site visits, job shadowing, and internships, ensuring accessibility for BIPOC students and those from rural areas.
- **Support for Rural Programs:** Allocate funding and resources to support programs specifically designed for rural communities, addressing their unique needs and challenges. Invest in technology and transportation to enhance access to education and training opportunities for rural learners and provide financial assistance for related costs such as transportation and materials.
- **Exposure for Students and Parents, Particularly Spanish-speaking Communities:** Provide program information and materials in Spanish and host informational sessions and workshops in Spanish to engage Spanish-speaking communities. Collaborate with community leaders, school districts, and cultural organizations to ensure effective outreach and culturally relevant guidance on pursuing high priority occupations in agriculture and natural resources.
- **Promotion of Career Pathways:** Develop marketing materials and online resources that highlight career pathways within the sector and showcase the successes of individuals from diverse backgrounds, focusing on Spanish-speaking and indigenous populations. Partner with schools and community organizations to integrate career exploration activities into curricula and provide training for educators and counselors on supporting BIPOC and rural students.