

Agriculture leads a decrease in Fresno County unemployment

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An uptick in farm jobs between March and April — the first wave of the central San Joaquin Valley's busy agricultural season — is helping the area's jobless rate improve.

Unemployment numbers released Friday by the [state Employment Development Department](#) show Fresno County's unemployment rate fell to 10.2% from a revised 11.1% the month before. It's down from 12% from a year ago and is the lowest April unemployment rate reported for the county since 2008 when it was 9.7%, said Steven Gutierrez, a labor market analyst with the EDD in Fresno.

Jobless rates in Kings, Madera, Merced and Tulare counties also improved, ranging from 10.4% in Madera to 11.6% in Merced.

In just one month, farm employment in Fresno grew by 8,200 jobs, up 20.8%, as the blueberry harvest begins and the strawberry season continues. In March, farms reported 500 fewer jobs. But compared to a year ago, farm employment is down by 1,100 jobs, the EDD said.

47,700

Total farm jobs in Fresno County

"The unemployment rate typically drops this time of year due to an influx of farm jobs," Gutierrez said. "This is a seasonal trend where you will see, as the weather warms up and agriculture comes back to into play, we'll have an uptick in farm employment."

Other industries reporting gains month-to-month were leisure and hospitality, growing by 800 jobs, as businesses prepare for the start of baseball season and summer trips to the national parks. The government sector added 200 jobs.

Professional and business services reported the largest year-over-year increase of 4,100 jobs, including 3,300 administrative, support and waste services jobs, between April 2014 and 2015. The sector, however, saw a loss of 600 professional, scientific, and technical services jobs between March and April this year.

Professional and business services sector has grown by 4,000 jobs year-over-year for three consecutive months.

Manufacturing, which includes producers of durable goods and food processing, hit its highest job total so far this year with 900 jobs. "This is the highest job total we've seen since April 2004 when it hit 1,110 jobs," Gutierrez said.

Besides farming, the only other job sector to see year-over-year losses was construction, which had 300 fewer positions.

Still, "year-over-year growth in Fresno County is off to a good start," Gutierrez said.

The statewide unemployment rate fell to 6.3% from 7.8% in March. Nationally, the rate dropped to 5.4%.

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