

October farm job losses drive Fresno County unemployment rate higher

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The beginning of a seasonal lull in agricultural work led to the loss of more than 11,000 farm jobs in Fresno County between September and October, driving the countywide unemployment rate up by 1.3 percentage points from September, to 9.3 percent.

Figures released Friday by the state Employment Development Department reveal that gains in non-farm jobs weren't enough to make up for the impact of the end of agriculture's busy harvest seasons for crops such as raisins and almonds, said Steven Gutierrez, a labor market consultant for the EDD in Fresno.

Still, Gutierrez added, last month reflected the lowest October unemployment rate since October 2008. It was also the sixth consecutive month in which Fresno County's unemployment rate was less than 10 percent – something that hadn't been achieved since 2007, before an economic recession reached full bloom in the region.

A similar pattern was depicted in neighboring Valley counties – higher than September, but lower than a year ago.

October was the 49th consecutive month in which Fresno County's unemployment rate was lower than it was a year earlier. The rate in October 2013 was 10.4 percent.

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Steven Gutierrez, EDD labor market consultant in Fresno

The loss of farm jobs is typical this time of year as agricultural activity slows considerably in the fall and winter seasons. "Looking back, we've seen some bigger drops in recent years; it was 17,200 jobs in 2008" in Fresno County, Gutierrez said. "It's going to stay slow until the spring, depending on when we see farm work start to pick up and how much rain we get this winter."

Farming represents the fourth-largest industry for employment in the county, behind government (including federal, state and local agencies as well as state colleges and universities and public schools), trade/transportation/utilities, and private-sector education and health services. Because agriculture is such a substantial force in the Valley's economy, "even though we saw seasonal gains in other industries, the loss of farm jobs kind of wipes things out because it was such a large drop," Gutierrez added.

California's statewide unemployment rate fell slightly, from 5.9 percent in September to 5.8 percent last month, on the strength of adding about 41,200 jobs during the month. Over the past year, the EDD estimates that California has seen an increase of about 463,000 jobs.

Nationally, unemployment rates fell in 32 states including California as employers across the country added the most jobs of any month so far this year. Rates rose in three states and were unchanged in 15 states. The nationwide unemployment rate for October was estimated at 5 percent, down from 5.1 percent in September.

This story will be updated.

The Associated Press contributed to this report. Tim Sheehan: [559-441-6319](tel:559-441-6319), [@TimSheehanNews](https://twitter.com/TimSheehanNews)

Valley unemployment rates

Monthly unemployment rates for central San Joaquin Valley counties for October 2015, compared to the prior month and prior year:

	October 2015	September 2015	October 2014
Fresno County	9.3%	8.0%	10.4%
Kings County	9.7%	8.0%	10.6%
Madera County	8.9%	7.6%	9.5%
Merced County	9.1%	8.1%	10.2%
Tulare County	10.8%	9.9%	11.9%

Source: California Employment Development Department