

End of grape harvest drives jobless rate up slightly

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The end of the seasonal grape harvest in Fresno County led to a loss of 5,900 farm jobs between October and November, driving the countywide jobless rate up slightly last month. But on the upside, holiday hiring helped boost the retail trade sector.

Unemployment numbers released Friday by the state Employment Development Department show Fresno County's unemployment rate in November increased to 9.9 percent from a revised 9.2 percent in October. The rate in November 2014 was 11.3 percent.

The trend is similar in surrounding counties – fewer agricultural jobs.

But overall, last month reflected the lowest November unemployment rate since November 2007 when it was 9.1 percent, said Steven Gutierrez, a labor market consultant for the EDD in Fresno. It also was "the seventh consecutive month we have seen unemployment rates in the single digits," he said.

Other industries reporting losses include food manufacturing, down 900 jobs. The construction and professional and business services sectors each lost 300 jobs.

Last month, the trade, transportation and utilities sector gained 1,800 jobs mostly because of holiday hiring in the retail area, according to the employment department.

Leisure and hospitality recorded an increase of 2,600 jobs year-over-year, its largest jump so far in 2015, Gutierrez said. "What drives this sector is when consumers have discretionary income, it allows them to spend on entertainment – your restaurants and drinking establishments," he said.

Educational and health services also added 2,600 jobs from a year ago, while trade, transportation and utility gained 1,700 positions.

The statewide unemployment rate fell to 5.7 percent from 5.8 percent in October. Nationally, the rate was unchanged at 5 percent.

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