

**Presentation by Chris Cheney
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for

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The Plight of Agriculture in Washington State
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Why is our state different than other states regarding UI and agriculture?

	Farmworkers	Population
CA-	535,256	35,891,000
WA-	262,528	6,204,000
TX-	166,117	22,490,000
FL-	118,581	17,397,000

Source: 2002 Census of Agriculture
2004 US Census estimates

Washington is the only northern tier state on the list== shorter growing season. No other northern state has anywhere near the labor intensive structure of the above states. And we have the highest per capita farmworker population.

Why does agriculture disagree with Dr. Vromans recommendations?

In the mid 1980s the crafters of our UI system (Senators Vognild and Newhouse) recognized that the nature of our states high concentration of seasonal/intermittent work needs could not be covered under UI by the seasonal/intermittent employers and thus created MLFA (marginal labor force attachment). In 2003, SB 6097 eliminated the non charging of MLFA benefits. This caused a “hit” to the agriculture and food processing industries in the form of increased benefit charges, which we hoped could be addressed in future sessions.

HB 2255 moves the system back to 2 quarter averaging and Dr. Vromans recommendation is that we stay with 2 qtr averaging in the future, which is another big hit for us.

Ag and food processing compete with out of state businesses, even in our own state. We cannot pass on increased costs—the market dictates the prices paid.