

5 Economics Development Element

5.1 Introduction and Purpose

The purpose of the Economic Development element is to provide context, economic development priorities and how where they might occur and summarize the County's role in supporting economic development ~~synthesize the various components within the Comprehensive Plan that relate to current and emerging land use, growth, and economic issues into a summary from which deliberate and sustained action toward economic objectives can be formulated and pursued.~~ A strong diversified economy provides a high quality of life for the citizens of Benton County and the region. This, in turn, generates the resources through which local governments provide for the health, safety, and welfare of its citizens. The Economic Development element has been ~~developed designed to provide direction and specific actions~~ consistent with other plan elements, goals and policies (Section 2.6), the Benton County Economic Development Plan (2024) and the ~~2026-2030~~ 2026-2030 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for Benton and Franklin counties ~~(BFCG 2026-2030)~~ The County Economic Development Plan, including future updates, is adopted by reference into the Comprehensive Plan. This element and the County's Economic Development Plan are designed to communicate a coherent and consistent message about the County's approach to sustainable community and economic development. The County's Economic Development Plan includes detail on projects funded in whole or in part by the County's "Rural County Capital Fund" along with other funding sources used by the County to support economic development, and provides a comprehensive economic development strategy specific to the County. This strategy is part of the larger regional strategy outlined in the ~~The 2026-2030~~ 2026-2030 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. This regional strategy is designed to create employment opportunities, improve local conditions, foster more stable and diversified local economies, and provide a mechanism for guiding and coordinating the efforts of local organizations and individuals concerned with the economic development of this area. This Element integrates findings from the Benton County Industrial Lands Inventory and Energy Overlay Analysis to ensure that future development is strategically located to support economic resilience, maximize infrastructure investments, and protect agricultural and environmental resources.

~~While during World War II and the post-war years, the region's economy was largely dependent on federal funding for Hanford projects, it has since become a diverse center for agriculture, energy, advanced manufacturing, and transportation, as well as tourism (conferences, wineries, etc.) The county grows more than 100 commercial crops including apples, sweet corn, potatoes, onions and grapes, which produces 900 million dollars in sales annually (WSU citation). The clean energy programs of the region encompass the Columbia Generating Station, the Nine Canyon Wind Project with a maximum potential of generating 95.9 megawatts, as well as the Juniper Canyon Wind Farm. The Port of Benton is also a great hub for transportation, offering systems for rail, barge, and two~~

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airports. Almost 400 million dollars in goods and services come in each year, creating more than 10,000 jobs (Port of Benton site). In 2025 the county acquired 9.56 million dollars through the RAISE grant for improving the infrastructure and updating track on the industrial rail line connecting Kennewick and Richland. The county is also a strong draw for tourism, specifically in regard to its more than 200 wineries within a 50-mile radius. Visitors to the region spent upwards of 600 million dollars in 2024, and there are almost 6,000 travel-related jobs between Benton and Franklin counties. The county has also made strides in areas of construction and advanced manufacturing, producing medical equipment and fabricating nuclear fuel. Construction jobs make up about 8% of employment. Healthcare is also a growing field and is now the county's largest employer. Though still Benton and Franklin counties' largest single employer, as of 2023, the region is no longer as reliant as it once was on the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory and its direct ties to the Hanford projects and continues to make significant strides in economic diversification.

For the future economic growth of the county, there are seven key ongoing and planned areas for development. BFCG 2026-2030. For the future economic growth of the county, there are seven key ongoing and planned areas for development, as outlined in BFCG 2026-2030:

- The Horn Rapids Business Center and Industrial Park has an already existing infrastructure that is accessible for transport with efficient and lower-cost options of exports and transportation of goods. The Business Center houses battery manufacturing, nuclear component manufacturing, and storage (the country's largest fully-automated freezer resides here) facilities. Agricultural companies have also expressed interest in the area.
- The I-82 South Sub Area and Lewis and Clark Ranch are both areas being transitioned from agricultural use to urban developments, both commercial and recreational.
- Kennewick's Historic Waterfront District has plans to revitalize the area and become a tourist destination for food, wine, and art with recreation, as well as some residential living.
- Similar plans have been made for the Southridge District, but with an added area for industrial use due to its easy interstate access.
- The Northwest Advanced Clean Energy Park in Richland is an industrial and technological development area and is set to include agriculture, advanced manufacturing and clean energy.

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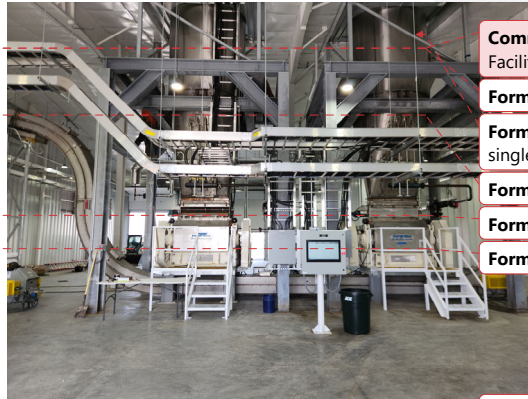
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- Lastly, the land at Vista Field, formerly an airport, has an ambitious initiative to become a town center, drawing innovation with the intent to create high-wage jobs. This will be a community centered key location for the future of the county (BFCG 2026-2030 CEDS).

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While not called out specifically in the CEDS, the Plymouth/Patterson area in Benton County is also an important industrial development area. AgReserves and other businesses have made significant investments in recent years in agriculture products processing (onion packing and corn flaking facilities) and atmosphere controlled storage facilities to help diversify the types of products the region can provide.



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The strategic priorities for development in the region over the next five years are as follows:

Adequate and Resilient Infrastructure - A focus on maintaining natural and built assets, namely those for transportation and digital technology; energy innovation is key to attracting new industries. There is also an added focus on filling skill gaps in the workforce.

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Economic Resilience and Disaster Preparedness - To ensure adaptability and recoverability from any potential economic harm (economic, environmental, tech changes, health crises, global market changes) the region must have a proactive approach for as little disturbance as possible. This strategy must include collaboration between major stakeholders to share funding and assistance.

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Efficient and Effective Collaboration - Unity of all interested parties in the county is an important resilience strategy for joint grants, shared data, and workforce partnerships.

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Strengthen and Diversify Industries - An effort to decrease reliance on government jobs and expand and innovate will bring a diverse industry base. The region will seek to support entrepreneurship and small business growth competitiveness. Strengthening the connection between business/workforce/education is also vital in providing access to training for broad, transferable skills and digital literacy.

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Workforce development - Seek to find and fill gaps in training and education by encouraging the creation of local workforce training programs, to ensure a skilled and adaptable workforce who can adjust to shifts in the industry

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5.2 Hanford Nuclear Reservation

With the creation of the Hanford Reservation in 1943, the local economy became bimodal: pre-existing agriculture work outside the site and defense related construction and activities on the site. Due to the secret and hazardous nature of the site, it discouraged local private center investments and the region's economy remained stagnant for the next 50 years.

This situation remained until the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s, which enabled a new mission of cleanup of the Hanford Site. There has been a gradual reduction in the Hanford workforce over time. A Tri-Party Agreement was signed in 1989 by the State of Washington, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the U.S. Department of Energy which sets forth Site cleanup objectives, projects, and milestones. If funded by congress annually, it does extend but gradually reduces Hanford employment levels as cleanup is achieved over time. The current mission is fundamentally different in scope, purpose, and effect, driving new science and technologies that are often marketable worldwide, in effect creating a more diversified and resilient economy.

The local economy, while still dependent on Hanford, especially in the Tri-Cities area, has adapted and diversified its economy. Most recent data have indicated that economic conditions continue to improve over the past two years with the growth of renewable energy projects, such as wind and solar energy, and a scaled down emphasis on agriculture and federal energy (BFCG, 2026-2030) (Oneza & Associates 2017).

The Hanford area's B Reactor, consisting of historic facilities at Hanford, was authorized by Congress in December 2014 to be included in the Manhattan Project National Historical Park. The Hanford area and the Vernita Bridge area's public access to recreational facilities attract Hanford based tourism in the region. In 2025, the US House and Senate approved a continued nuclear energy tax credit for the Columbia Generating Station on the Hanford site. The station is crucial to the Northwest with a generating capacity of up to 1,207 megawatts, the equivalent of powering a million homes. This paves the way for new jobs and research and development opportunities for the region.

Energy Northwest (ENW) and X-Energy have also partnered to pursue permitting to develop smaller nuclear reactors at the



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Hanford site to help power Amazon data centers using clean energy. Advancements also continue to be made in solar and wind energy. [The U.S Department of Energy identified PNNL as a strategic location for next-generation clean energy development and advanced computing infrastructure due to its proximity to existing transmission capacity, access to hydropower and nuclear power, and the potential deployment of small modular reactors \(SMRs\) to provide reliable baseload energy. The City of Richland currently holds 295 acres of federally transferred land reserved specifically for economic development to support these initiatives. PNNL’s workforce, favorable climate conditions, and absence of major natural hazards position the region as a premier location for AI-driven data centers and energy-intensive research facilities. These national investments will drive future employment, infrastructure expansion, and energy system upgrades, reinforcing Benton County’s role as a national hub for clean energy innovation, advanced manufacturing, and information technology.](#)

5.3 Energy

[Renewable energy continues to be a state priority, and energy infrastructure and innovation are central to Benton County’s long-term economic competitiveness. Washington State has enacted comprehensive policies to transition toward renewable energy such as wind and solar. The Clean Energy Transformation Act \(CETA\)1 mandates that electric utilities achieve carbon-neutral electricity by 2030, and supply 100% renewable or non-emitting electricity by 2045. Additionally, the Energy Independence Act \(RCW 19.285.040\) requires large utilities to meet specific renewable energy targets \(source AC Geo energy memo - <https://bentoncountywa.municipalone.com//files/documents/DraftEnergyOverlay1423050301082525PM.pdf>\).](#)

~~Add brief discussion about energy overlay from Adam’s memo.~~

[Benton County’s economy benefits from a growing renewable energy sector that complements the region’s agricultural, industrial, and manufacturing activities. Utility-scale solar and wind projects, along with energy storage facilities, are increasingly part of the County’s economic landscape. These projects support local employment, contribute to the regional tax base, and provide opportunities for collaboration with existing industrial centers and transportation infrastructure, including rail and barge systems at the Port of Benton. Energy development also encourages innovation in advanced manufacturing and construction, while contributing to regional energy reliability and sustainability goals. Future economic opportunities in Benton County are expected to include continued growth in solar and wind energy, battery storage, and emerging technologies such as small modular reactors and anaerobic digestion facilities.](#)

[To guide renewable energy development while protecting high-value agricultural lands and sensitive habitats, Benton County has established an Energy Overlay. Analysis for the Energy Overlay identifies “lower conflict” areas where utility-scale solar and wind facilities can be sited with minimal impacts](#)

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<https://bentoncountywa.municipalone.com//files/documents/DraftEnergyOverlay1423050301082525PM.pdf>

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on farmland, priority habitats, wetlands, and steep slopes. This approach ensures that energy development contributes to the local economy in areas suitable for such uses while maintaining protections for agricultural and environmentally sensitive lands.

With the recent global advancements in Artificial Intelligence and the growing demand for the country to stay at the forefront of this field, demand for reliable electricity is increasing rapidly. Major energy and technology initiatives have been proposed in the region due to its existing transmission infrastructure, availability of carbon-free power resources such as hydropower and nuclear energy, and access to a highly skilled workforce. As a result, Benton County and the surrounding region are expected to experience continued interest in energy-dependent industries such as data centers, advanced manufacturing, and research facilities. Many large data centers have already been constructed across the Columbia River in Oregon, where access to transmission lines, tax increment financing, and industrial land has enabled co-location of energy generation, storage, and high-demand users. In Benton County, strategically co-locating energy generation with industrial uses in areas served by existing or planned infrastructure may help reduce pressure on agricultural lands, maximize grid efficiency, and support long-term economic resilience. Incorporating strategies such as the Energy Overlay helps guide energy development to support economic opportunities while remaining compatible with agricultural uses, environmental resources, and community values. With the recent global advancements in Artificial Intelligence and the growing demand for the country to stay at the forefront of this field, the US Department of Energy has selected PNNL as a possible site for developing much needed infrastructure. Benton county and the surrounding region will continue to see growth in this area and an increase in the need for data centers. Many data centers, with high energy consumption needs, have been constructed in recent years across the river from Benton County in Umatilla and Morrow counties in Oregon.

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5.35.4 Existing Conditions

Benton County's economy is characterized by a diverse mix of traditional sectors such as agriculture, food processing, freight transportation, and federal employment, alongside growing sectors including health care, education, clean energy, advanced manufacturing, and professional and technical services. The Tri-Cities region continues to serve as a center for agricultural production, scientific research, energy generation, and regional trade. Economic diversification is occurring as new industries emerge in response to energy transition policies, infrastructure investments, and technological change.

Current ~~in large measure, current~~ trends at the regional level indicate growth and resurgence of the region's historic economies (agriculture and food processing, water and rail transportation for commerce). Additional trends that are related to historic activities and the natural resource base of

this area are agri-tourism, anchored by an emerging viticulture (wine) industry and specialty crop farming and retailing, and visitor-serving commercial and recreational activities, with the center attractions being the riverine environments at the confluence of the Snake, Columbia, and Yakima rivers in the Tri-Cities. The trend on the Hanford Site has been to continue to open the site to a much broader range of uses and activities.

[Agriculture in Benton County grew rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s as the Columbia Basin Project was completed, spurring growth in both agricultural production and value-added areas such as food processing and chemical fertilizer development. Agriculture and food processing remains a central part of Benton County's economy. The county grows more than 100 commercial crops including apples, sweet corn, potatoes, onions and grapes, which produces 900 million dollars in sales annually \(WSU citation Agriculture WSU 2025\). The sector has increasingly diversified through value-added processing, controlled-atmosphere storage, and specialty crops that support both domestic and export markets. However, agriculture is also subject to challenges such as drought conditions, input costs, and labor constraints. Agri-tourism has emerged as an important component of this sector, with wineries, farm-based events, and specialty crop activities drawing regional and national visitors. Agricultural producers face increasing pressure from input costs, drought conditions, and labor availability, which affect long-term viability. The clean energy programs of the region encompass the Columbia Generating Station, the Nine Canyon Wind Project with a maximum potential of generating 95.9 megawatts, as well as the Juniper Canyon Wind Farm.](#)



[Agricultural lands in Benton County](#)

[Industrial activities play an important role in the County's economy and include manufacturing, logistics, warehousing, clean energy technologies, and emerging energy-intensive uses. A substantial portion of industrial activity in the County supports agriculture through food processing, controlled-atmosphere storage, and crop transportation facilities. These agricultural-related industrial uses are](#)

strategically located near agricultural areas and transportation corridors, reinforcing the County's role as a hub for value-added agricultural processing and distribution.

The region's energy economy includes existing hydropower, nuclear, wind, and solar facilities, and is expected to expand as demand increases for clean energy generation, storage, and grid reliability. The clean energy programs of the region encompass region's existing clean energy programs include the Columbia Generating Station, the Nine Canyon Wind Project with a maximum potential of generating 95.9 megawatts, as well as the Juniper Canyon Wind Farm. Additional large scale wind, solar, and nuclear energy projects have been proposed but have not been completed. Proposed energy projects reflect both state policy requirements and market demand from industrial and data infrastructure sectors.

The Port of Benton is also a ~~great hub for transportation~~ multimodal transportation hub, offering systems for rail, barge, and two airports. Almost 400 million dollars in goods and services come in each year, creating more than 10,000 jobs ("Economic Development" Port of Benton site). In 2025 the ~~county~~ Port acquired 9.56 million dollars through the RAISE grant for improving the infrastructure and updating track on the industrial rail line connecting Kennewick and Richland.

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Tourism remains a key contributor to Benton County's economy, generating more than \$600 million in visitor spending in 2024 and supporting approximately 6,000 travel-related jobs in Benton and Franklin counties. With more than 200 wineries within a 50-mile radius, wine-focused tourism continues to drive visitor spending and support hospitality-related jobs. The tourism sector is diversifying through agri-tourism, river recreation, event venues, and outdoor activities, helping to broaden the economic base. However, growth in tourism also presents challenges, including pressures on agricultural lands, increased demand for supporting infrastructure, and land use compatibility issues where tourism-related activities occur within working agricultural areas. Broader macroeconomic factors—such as fluctuations in agricultural markets, labor availability, and the cost of inputs—also influence the long-term viability of agriculture and related tourism activities. The county is also a strong draw for tourism, specifically in regard to its more than 200 wineries within a 50-mile radius. Visitors to the region spent upwards of 600 million dollars in 2024, and there are almost 6,000 travel related jobs between Benton and Franklin counties.

The county has also made strides in areas of construction and advanced manufacturing, producing medical equipment and fabricating nuclear fuel. Construction jobs make up about 8% of employment. Healthcare is also a growing field. Though Benton and Franklin counties' largest single employer, as of 2023, the region is no longer as reliant as it once was on the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory and its direct ties to the Hanford projects and continues to make significant strides in economic diversification.

A presentation of the history of the County's economic foundations of natural resource trade and commerce as it has evolved, and as it may be applicable to emerging economic opportunities and trends in Benton County and the region, occurs in the Land Use element (Chapter 3).

5.3.15.4.1 State and Regional Growth Trends

As required by state planning law, the focus within this Element is on "regional" and even global economic issues. The Pacific Northwest region of the country is experiencing rapid population and economic growth. The state of Washington has been growing at an average of over 7090,000 persons per year in the last decade and is projected to continue growing over the next 20 years that [pace \(OFM 2024\)](#). A regional growth trend can be seen in the Benton and Franklin counties' cumulative population growth shown in Figure 3-2. Benton County also continues to experience high levels of growth. In unincorporated Benton County, the farm economy has been very strong, with steady increases in "farm gate" and "value added" dollars, as well as employment numbers. Table 5-1 presents population and economic indicators in Benton and Franklin counties.

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**Table 5-1
Population Growth and Economic Indicators**

County	Population ¹		Civilian Labor Force ² (% of total population)	
	2015	2024	2015	2024
Benton	188,590	218,190	62.9	62.2
Franklin	87,150	101,238	75.0	66.1

Notes:
1. Washington State Office of Financial Management
2. U.S. Census Bureau

Notwithstanding the local effects from the Hanford Site, the regional focus is a natural one for the County, which is a "regional service provider." The local and regional economic history (the custom and culture) has been one of resource-based commodities trade (fisheries, fur, livestock, agriculture, minerals, and hydroelectric power), and related regional road, water, and rail transportation.

The custom and culture economy is largely the same today, except that some technologies have evolved into their own industries (e.g., irrigation systems and technology), and productivity has increased. The transportation systems that move these products have also undergone changes in technology and scale; they now serve global markets.

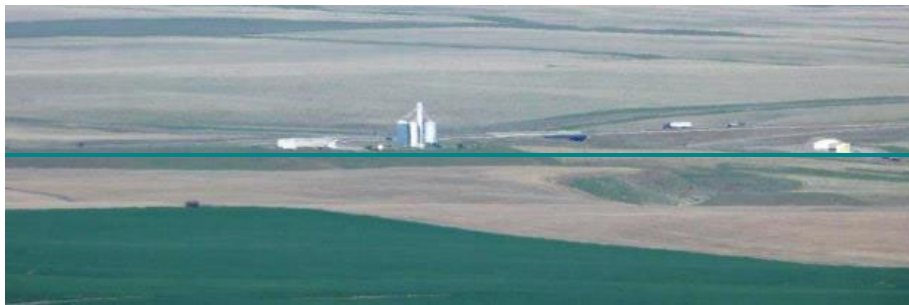
Within the last decade there have been local economic spin-offs (e.g., agri-tourism) from these traditional economic activities and new regional economies (visitor-serving commercial and recreation), which have expanded economic opportunities locally.

Agriculture grew rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s as the Columbia Basin Project was completed. The associated growth was not only in agricultural production, but also in value-added areas such as food processing and chemical fertilizer development. Recent economic trends indicate a shift in Benton County's employment growth away from agriculture toward other sectors such as construction. Unlike growth trends in previous years, however, which saw agriculture as the region's fastest-growing industry, more recent data shows a much faster growth in construction (+76%), health care (+38%), and leisure/hospitality employment (+33%). Comparatively, agriculture employment grew only around 10% over the last decade. The county has also seen an increase in transportation, warehousing, and utilities jobs. In the same time frame, there has been a decrease of jobs in manufacturing, retail trade, and government sectors. jobs (BFCG 2026-2030 ESD 2025). Top sectors for short and long-term future employment growth are summarized in Table 5-2 below.

Table 5-2 | **Fastest Growth in Employment**

Major Growth Sectors	Growth Rate Short Term (2023-2028)	Growth Rate Long Term (2028-2033)
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	2.13	0.98
Transportation and Warehousing	2.13	0.50
Education Services	2.53	1.15
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	2.68	0.87
Health services and Social Assistance	2.33	1.35

Source: Washington State Employment and Security Department Projections (August 2025)



Agricultural lands in Benton County

5.3.2 Benton County Economic Conditions

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Based on the 2023~~15~~ American Community Survey, the median household income in Benton County is ~~\$60,254~~ 87,316 (U.S. Census Bureau 20~~24~~15). The Washington State Employment and Security Department is forecasting all industries in Benton and Franklin counties to have a positive, though slowing, growth rate between 20~~24~~4 and 20~~32~~4. Short term non-farm projected growth has decreased slightly from 1.31 percent between 2019 and 2024 to about 1 percent between 2025 and 2029 (BFCG 2026-2030~~(CEDs 2025)~~).

~~New specialty crop plantings have increased, along with innovations in harvesting, storage, and transport. However, in recent years droughts in the central Washington area have been detrimental to agriculture. The Roza Irrigation District received only 42% of its water rights in 2025. Improved irrigation efforts continue, but they are costly and slow. Farmers are occupied so much with short-term problem solving, it makes it difficult to plan ahead. Farm income dropped 42% across the state between 2022 and 2023 (Capitol Press 2025). Viticulture and agri-tourism continue to grow in the agricultural economy and may be a path forward for struggling income. Winery experiences, farm-to-table events, and U-pick operations create opportunities to lighten the strain of reduced production. Value added processing plants, as well as cold storage and transport facilities have also been constructed.~~



Vineyards in Benton County

~~Both the County and its farm products remain advantageously situated to serve expanding Asian markets.~~

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Table 5-2 | **Fastest Growth in Employment**

Major Growth Sectors	Growth Rate Short Term (2023-2028)	Growth Rate Long Term (2028-2033)
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	2.13	0.98
Transportation and Warehousing	2.13	0.50
Education Services	2.53	1.15
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	2.68	0.87
Health services and Social Assistance	2.33	1.35

Source: Washington State Employment and Security Department Projections (Suljic August 2025)

5.4.2 Economic Diversification

Economic diversification is essential to Benton County’s long-term resilience. This includes both diversification within existing core sectors such as agriculture and the continued growth of expanding sectors such as tourism, renewable energy, and technology-based industries.

In recent years droughts in the central Washington area have been detrimental to agriculture. The Roza Irrigation District received only 42% of its water rights in 2025. Improved irrigation efforts continue, but they are costly and slow. Farm income dropped 42% across the state between 2022 and 2023, and the need to address immediate challenges leaves many farmers with limited capacity for long-term planning (Capitol Press 2025). Viticulture and agri-tourism continue to grow in the agricultural economy and may be a path forward for struggling income. Agritourism and related enterprises such as winery experiences, farm-to-table events, and U-pick operations create opportunities to lighten the strain of reduced production. Value-added processing plants, along with new cold storage and transport facilities, have strengthened the County’s agricultural supply chain and supported surrounding farm operations. Continued investment is needed to help producers grow high-quality crops that meet changing global consumer demands for sustainably produced, specialty, and premium products. Supporting infrastructure—such as advanced storage, processing, transportation, and marketing facilities—will be essential to maintain competitiveness in these markets. Benton County and its agricultural products remain strategically positioned to serve expanding Asian and international export markets.



Vineyards in Benton County

There is a continued need to further diversify the local non-farm economy's dependence on federal funding of Hanford projects. This must be done before those projects begin to wind down as cleanup milestones are completed, or before congressional budgetary considerations negatively affect project outlays. Meaningful strides toward a diversified local economy, independent of federal budgets for Hanford, have been made and these efforts are expected to continue.

5.3.3

~~Despite the above optimistic outlook in the eastern Washington region, the continued need remains is to further diversify to reduce the local non-farm economy's dependence on federal funding of Hanford projects. This must be done before those projects begin to wind down as cleanup milestones are completed, or before congressional budgetary considerations negatively affect project outlays. Meaningful strides toward a diversified local economy, independent of federal budgets for Hanford, have been made and these efforts must are expected to continue.~~

5.45.5 Summary of Economic Development Priorities

Items 1 through 9 on the following pages are currently the highest priorities for the commitment of County resources toward the objective of economic growth and development.

Though the items are shown as discrete economic activities, many in fact are naturally interrelated. For example, agriculture, agri-tourism, and visitor-serving recreational and commercial activities are mutually supportive and related, especially when located in the same geographic area of the County (e.g., the Tapteal Greenway and Red Mountain Wineries). These symbiotic relationships should be identified, facilitated, and encouraged for economic growth.

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Each of the priorities listed is a "regional" activity. For example, vineyards and wineries dot the regional landscape of Benton, Franklin, and Yakima counties. The recently constructed viticulture center, the Walter Clore Wine & Culinary Center, in Prosser which showcases regional wines and wineries would be an appropriate project for County involvement.



Columbia Crest Winery in Benton County

All the priorities listed below should be pursued simultaneously, with the overall level of effort allocated to each at any point in time being a reflection of its timeliness and cost/benefit outlook. For example, the local opportunities and demands of an expanding rail and waterborne transportation system for global commerce, and linked to area agricultural commodities, is currently significant and will likely continue to increase.

Where appropriate, partnering with local jurisdictions and other private, public, and governmental entities for planning, public processes, and financing capital improvements is preferred.

1. Commodities, Trade, and Transport

Engage other public entities (e.g., the State of Washington, the federal government regarding Hanford and the Columbia River, and local port and utility districts) in planning for the provision of land and infrastructure capacities that anticipate the expanding demands of commerce, trade, and transport.

Locations: Opportunities for enhancing local employment through this economic sector exist in:

- The Ports of Benton and Kennewick properties and other properties within both urban and rural areas of the County
- The area in north Richland, recently transferred from the U.S. Department of Energy to the City of Richland, the Port of Benton, and Energy Northwest for industrial use

2. Agriculture, Processing, and Value-Added Industries

Assure through coordination with other public entities (e.g., the State of Washington, the federal government regarding Hanford and the Columbia River, and local port and utility districts) that the complexity of land and infrastructure resources necessary to support the expanding demands for agricultural products and food processing and value-added industries exists. Essential components are all season farm to market roads, utilities service, and multi-modal transportation access to

processing, shipping, and storage areas; water resources for irrigation and processing; and industrial waste disposal facilities.

Locations: Opportunities to meet these needs exist in:

- Prosser industrial area
- Plymouth industrial area – An emerging industrial area with significant crop storage infrastructure and access to railway transport. Recent development has included new atmosphere-controlled onion storage buildings and a commercial steam corn flaker capable of making up to 800 tons of flaked corn daily (See photos below). The river, rail, and highway access, and proximity to Umatilla, Oregon, make Plymouth a key hub for processing and distribution of locally produced agricultural products to wider markets. The growth of industrial uses at the site is expected to continue over the next 20 years.
- Plymouth industrial area – An emerging industrial area with access to railway transport and storage sheds that fit — Grain Handling Inc has built a commercial steam corn flaker capable of making up to 800 tons of flaked corn daily. (See photos below)
- Rural areas of the County next to agriculture production areas

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Commented [BF81]: Discuss how Plymouth is an emerging industrial area with rail, food storage and processing improvements in process or planned.

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Locational requirements that can be integrated with those of Priority No. 1 above should be fully maximized.



Plymouth Industrial Area



3. Agri-tourism

Commented [GW82]: We may have additional information to add by February

Work with agricultural and related interests whose focus is on visitors and tourism (e.g., specialty retail, wineries, breweries, bed and breakfasts, farmers markets) to assure that zoning, development standards, and improved road access facilitate such activities.

Locations: Commercial agriculture in Benton County is ubiquitous over the landscape; any farmer or resident may seek to engage in agri-tourism enterprises. There are, however, locations that provide

notable opportunities due to location and/or the stated intent of the farmers to engage in agri-tourism. These are:

- The Prosser area, Wine Country Road, and Wittkopf Loop
- East of Benton City, in the Red Mountain AVA vineyards and wineries
- South Finley vineyards and orchards
- Paterson area vineyards and wineries

4. Visitor-Serving Recreation and Commercial

Develop County owned recreational lands and facilities, and implement recreational plans of the Comprehensive Plan, which will improve the quality of life for local residents and "spin-off" economic benefits to the local community from the regional visitor-serving and recreational economic sectors. Integrate and connect County facilities with those of the cities, e.g., Rivershore Enhancement and the Tapteal Greenway.

Locations: Along over 100 miles of shoreline extending from the Vernita Bridge on the Columbia River and Benton City on the Yakima River to Hover Park in south Finley and further down river to Plymouth in south Benton County:

- The Tapteal Greenway in the lower Yakima River has the potential to connect Columbia Point to Benton City and Red Mountain via West Richland and Horn Rapids County Park (see discussion of the Tapteal Greenway in Chapter 8)
- Hover Park in South Finley, with intertie access, brings visitors to south Finley orchards and vineyards
- [Badger and Candy mountain hiking trails](#)
- Two Rivers Park in Finley
- Vernita Terrace and through the Hanford Reach (Hanford Reach National Monument) and B Reactor Museum
- The island area partially owned by the Port of Kennewick off the rural community of Plymouth in the southern area of the County

5. Industrial Development

Work with the port and utility districts, WSDOT, and owners of industrially zoned land to provide lands zoned for industrial uses with transportation access and power (gas and electric). Work with municipalities or the state and local health districts to provide water and waste treatment capabilities sufficient to render industrial zoned lands marketable for industrial uses.

Locations: Notable locations of such lands in the unincorporated County are:

- All Rural Industrial lands

- The area in north Richland, recently transferred from the U.S. Department of Energy to the City of Richland, the Port of Benton, and Energy Northwest for industrial use
- Approximately 85 acres of industrial zoned land at the Interstate 82 and Badger Road interchange
- Rural Industrial lands by Paterson and at Plymouth in the south County
- ~~Rural Industrial land at Paterson in the south County~~

6. Agricultural Water Resources

Maintain a primary support role in the implementation of the Yakima Integrated Plan, work with agricultural and other stakeholders to address future water needs, and work with the broad range of water using interests to identify and obtain additional supplies and improve water quality (see discussion on Water Resources, Section 4.5).

Locations: The geographic areas within which this effort should be pursued are as follows:

- Yakima River Basin in conjunction with Yakima and Kittitas counties
- Within the rest of Benton County for those water supply and quality objectives that can be accomplished unilaterally with County partners

7. Hanford Site Industrial

Energy, national defense, nuclear medicine, and more general industrial are among the opportunities on the Hanford Site:

Locations: Within the Industrial and Research & Development Zones of the Hanford Site, anchored by existing rail, road, energy, and nuclear infrastructure:

- Medical isotope production by the Fast Flux Test Facility in the Hanford Site's 400 Area
- Development of an industrial energy park in the recently transferred industrial land from the U.S. Department of Energy to the City of Richland, the Port of Benton, and Energy Northwest

8. Resource Use at Sustainable Levels

Coordinate with local jurisdictions and state and federal resource agencies to manage and conserve natural and biological resources at sustainable levels to sustain local economic growth. This requires that it be based on a broad array of sustained resources.

Locations: Generally within land features identified as "critical areas" (Chapter 4), but also relating to resource issues which transcend specific areas, such as ground and surface waters, air quality, and species survival:

- Along the mainstems and tributaries of the Yakima and Columbia rivers and their associated riverine wetlands and near-shore uplands
- Within the Hanford Reach and on the Hanford Site that combined represent a biological resources "bank" within Benton County
- Within Benton County's jurisdictional portion of the Yakima River watershed relative to conservation of ground and surface waters

9. Law and Justice

The quality of life and economic growth of an area are fundamentally influenced by the actual conditions and perception of public safety and welfare. These perceptions are held by residents, visitors, and prospective new business and industry. The expansion of public safety facilities is favorable to economic growth.

Locations: The County Justice Center in Kennewick

10. Education

Coordinate with educational institutions to maintain robust educational programs that are relevant to the regional economy. Although education constitutes a smaller share of the regional economy, this sector has seen more growth than other economic sectors in the region. Washington State University's research activities are also integrated with local economy, such as agriculture and wine based research.

Locations: The Washington State University Richland Campus and the following:

- Washington State University Extension's agricultural and natural resource based program unit, community and economic development program unit, and youth and family program unit
- Columbia Basin College's Richland campus expansion
- Other K-12 and vocational schools

5.5.6 The County's Role in Economic Development and Diversification

The County's role is identified in its vision and policy statements at the beginning of this Chapter; it promotes economic development by providing basic regional services and infrastructure, where such provisions will promote economic development, public health and welfare, and environmental quality.

Though the range of regional service responsibilities of the County is broad, within the context of economic development, the principal responsibilities are:

- ~~L~~ong range planning
- ~~P~~roductive coordination with other jurisdictions and interests
- ~~the provision and/or operation and maintenance of i~~nfrastucture necessary to support the current economic base and provide competitive advantages to attract new economic growth

Depending upon the circumstance, the County may fulfill these responsibilities ~~unilaterally on its own~~ or in partnership with other entities such as the port districts, private industry and business, the state, or other local and regional political jurisdictions. For any given issue or project, the County's contribution may range from direct capital expenditures to in-kind services or coordination, integration, and/or facilitation.