

State, county unemployment rates about the same

Unemployment
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SANTA CRUZ — Unemployment dropped slightly to 11 percent in February from a revised 11.2 percent in January, leaving 15,800 of the county's 143,500 workers without jobs, according to numbers released Friday by the state Employment Development Department.

Warm temperatures heralded the return of many seasonal agricultural jobs. Farm jobs countywide increased 10.3 percent to 4,300 since January.

The number of available farm jobs began to rise last month thanks to warm weather and strawberries, according to Jess Brown of the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau.

Strawberry production accounts for the largest part of the local agriculture sector, so job numbers will continue to increase throughout the season, which runs from

late March and early April to November. Peak season for berries — and farm jobs — should coincide in June and July.

A 10.5 percent increase was noted in the food, beverage and tobacco manufacturing sector last month to 2,100 jobs, up from 1,900 a year ago.

The leisure and hospitality industry noted an increase of 200 jobs in the arts, entertainment and recreation field last month for an increase of 15.4 percent. Labor market analyst Janice Shriver attributed those increases to seasonal hires, perhaps because the tourism industry is preparing to swing into peak season.

General merchandisers saw a 7.1 percent drop, down 100 jobs to 1,300 in February. Those workers likely were casualties of the generally poor economy, Shriver said.

The county's unemployment rate was worse last month than it was during the same period a year ago. Unemployment stood at 10.5 percent in February 2002, with 15,000 people out of work. Still, the county's

total work force was larger by 1,300 last month than during the same period a year earlier.

California's unemployment rate remained unchanged in February as the state's economy continued to move sideways. The rate was 6.6 percent, unchanged from January. The rate was slightly higher than the 6.5 percent posted in February 2002.

The state lost jobs in the manufacturing, trade, leisure and hospitality and government services sectors in February and picked up jobs in construction, financial activities and education and health services sectors.

In a separate survey of households, state officials reported the number of unemployed Californians totaled 1.15 million in February, a decline of 8,000 from January but an increase of 24,000 compared to February of 2002.

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Jobless rate

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

February 2003: 11 percent

January 2003: 11.2 percent

December 2002: 9.8 percent

November 2002: 8.5 percent

October 2002: 6.5 percent

September 2002: 6.2 percent

August 2002: 5.9 percent

July 2002: 6.4 percent

June 2002: 6.5 percent

May 2002: 6.5 percent

April 2002: 8.9 percent

March 2002: 10 percent

February 2002: 10.5 percent

2002 unemployment average: 8 percent

Source: Employment Development
Department