

# Unemployment climbs in county

By KAREN A. DAVIS

SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — Seasonal layoffs in agriculture and food-processing jobs pushed the county's unemployment rate up more than a percent in December, leaving 13,100 of the county's 143,400 workers jobless.

December's unemployment rate was 9.1 percent, compared to 8 percent in November.

Last year at this time, the jobless rate was 8.3 percent, according to Janice Shriver, a labor market analyst for the state Employment Development Department.

California's unemployment rose slightly in December to 6.6 percent, up from a revised 6.5 percent in November, reflecting a continuing slowdown in the state's technology sector and the nation's sluggish economy.

The state rate remained higher than the 6.1 percent recorded in December 2001. It also was higher than the

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## Jobless rate

### SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

**December 2001:** 8.3 percent

**December 2002:** 9.1 percent

**November 2002:** 8 percent

**October 2002:** 6.1 percent

**September 2002:** 5.7 percent

**August 2002:** 5.5 percent

**July 2002:** 6 percent

**June 2002:** 6 percent

**May 2002:** 6.2 percent

**April 2002:** 8.6 percent

**March 2002:** 9.6 percent

**February 2002:** 9.9 percent

**January 2002:** 10.4 percent

Source: Employment Development Department, 2003

# Jobless

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national average of 6 percent for the month reported last week by the U.S. Labor Department.

Santa Cruz County's 5,000 total farm jobs decreased by 2,800 in December, which is typical for the season, Shriver said.

About 170 of the 200 seasonal workers who farm Edward Ortega's 100 acres of strawberries in Watsonville were among those affected.

Ortega, Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau president, said 30 employees are doing preparation work and routine maintenance such as weeding and installing irrigation ditches. Strawberry season won't kick into high gear here until May and some workers have traveled south in search of work during the hiatus.

Next hardest hit were government jobs, down 600, including 500 local and state education positions and 100 county government jobs.

The manufacturing sector saw a decrease of 500 jobs, 80 percent of which were food manufacturing and processing workers.

Restaurant jobs were down 300 from the same period a year ago.

If the country goes to war, the unemployment rate could improve — at least in the short term, Shriver said.

"If there is a war, that means people are leaving the labor market to go (fight) that war, which means there will be openings in that market in certain fields," she said.

Still, employment numbers could again drop when enlisted personnel return, since their jobs must be

held for them in their absence.

In the county, the annual average unemployment rate was 6.1 in 2001. Annual data for 2002 won't be available until February or March. Still, the highest unemployment totals recorded last year were during the months of January, February and March, with 10.4, 9.9 and 9.6 percent jobless, respectively.

Statewide, not counting farmworkers and those self-employed, unemployment dropped by 15,400 jobs during December. Compared with December 2001, the state lost 25,800 nonfarm jobs. About 1.165 million Californians were unemployed during the month, an increase of 10,000 from November and 97,000 compared with December 2001.

"We're seeing the reflection of the national economy," said Michael Bernick, director of the state Employment Development Department. "Plus we've had the added dynamic of the technology slowdown, which has greatly impacted the employment numbers in the Bay Area."

Two industry sectors, mining and services, added 2,000 jobs during the month, although both lost jobs compared to December 2001.

Statewide, the biggest job losses in December were in construction, manufacturing, trade, transportation/public utilities, finance, insurance/real estate and government. Those categories dropped a total of 17,400 jobs in December.

Unemployment in Santa Clara County, the heart of Silicon Valley, fell slightly to 7.5 percent in December. That continues a downward trend during the last few months. Unemployment in Santa Clara County was 7.8 percent in November and 8.1 percent in October.

Contact Karen A. Davis at [kdavis@santa-cruz.com](mailto:kdavis@santa-cruz.com).

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