

# Eastern WA Economic Development Alliance



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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

# ***Alliance brings five-county region together for business recruitment***

By Stephen McFadden  
Adams County Economic Development Director

In the competitive world of business recruitment, communities usually compete against each other to recruit new companies. Four economic development groups are taking a different approach by working together to collectively market a five-county region of Washington State.

Eastern Washington Economic Development Alliance members believe business and industry will find the region appealing. They also agree marketing the merits of the region provide companies with choices, a broader selection of land sites and cities that offer a variety of attributes.

The team formed in the fall of 2015 and consists of Adams County Development Council, Grant County Economic Development Council, Port of Pasco and Yakima County Development Association: New Vision.

Each agency is actively following economic development strategic plans in their respective counties. Much of their work is close to home, assisting existing businesses, lending critical support to startups and entrepreneurs or tackling workforce-training challenges.

Business and industry recruitment is just one facet of a comprehensive economic development effort. It's often the most expensive, long-term exercise.

"Our main goals are to increase jobs and tax base in our communities," said Gary Ballew, director of economic development and marketing for the Port of Pasco. "This means growing companies that are already



here, but we also try to bring in new companies. These new companies not only bring in new investments, they provide different job opportunities.”

Alliance members represent diverse counties with one major common denominator — the region is an agriculture mecca. Grant and Yakima Counties lead the state in the value of production for both crop and animal agriculture. The result? A wealth of food processing in multiple clusters throughout the five county region.

Manufacturing, technology, aerospace, distribution and logistics and research and development already have a strong and growing presence in the region.

Diversifying the region’s economy calls for target recruitment. The Alliance selects industry sectors that will fit well with the area.

“A cornerstone of our strategy is to improve the economic climate of the region to make it a top of mind location for food processing, manufacturing, and high tech production and employment,” said Jonathan Smith, President of Yakima County Development Association. “Working together cooperatively on recruitment efforts opens the door for collaboration in other areas that can result in a stronger Eastern Washington which will benefit all of us.”

Emily Braunwart, business recruitment manager for Grant County Economic Development

Council, believes the Alliance better serves the companies considering the region. The group, she said, is able to offer a company more location options that improve the odds of landing a new employer.

“When a business wants to locate in an area, they don’t look at a map and see boundary lines. These companies are going to be looking at a larger area that will fit all their needs,” she said. “To market an entire region such as Eastern Washington, we are able to open more doors than if we had tried to do this on our own.”

Companies conduct a substantial amount of internal research when planning the next expansion or relocation project. The analytical data helps determine, on paper, the best place to land. When company leaders meet with economic developers, they’re looking for specific nuances that set a specific location or region apart from all the other sites the company is considering.



*Photo by Jennifer Faith Photography*

**The Team:** Members of the Eastern Washington Economic Alliance debuted the group’s new exhibit booth at the Northwest Food & Beverage Processors Expo in Portland in January. “We bring a lot to the (dinner) table” is the theme of the booth. The team members are (left to right) Joe Schmitt, Yakima County Development Association; Emily Braunwart, Grant County Economic Development Council; Gary Ballew, Port of Pasco and Stephen McFadden, Adams County Development Council.

“By marketing together we can increase interest in our region by offering more opportunities for a company to land. I use a peanut butter analogy,” Ballew explained. “How much would you like to shop at a store that sells only one brand of peanut butter? Maybe a lot if that’s your brand but what if it isn’t. We end up offering a lot of different types of peanut butter, meaning we get more people into the store.”

To accomplish business recruitment, the Alliance has identified trade shows and industry specific expositions to attend. By pooling resources and sharing costs, the group has retained Research Consultants International (RCI) three times. The market research firm does the icebreaking. For a specific fee, the company secures and schedules meetings with companies specifically interested in Eastern Washington.

The Alliance first used RCI in September 2015 to identify leads at the Global Food Equipment and Technology Show. The team met with 10 companies and continues to work a pair of active leads.

“In terms of sheer numbers, the Alliance has made direct contact with more than 70 companies since launching the collective effort,” explained Stephen McFadden, Adams County Economic Development Director.

The Alliance was an exhibitor at the Northwest Food & Beverage Manufacturers Expo in Portland in January. In February the team conducted 23 company meetings at the World Ag Expo in Tulare, Calif. Most recently the Natural Products West Expo in Anaheim, Calif., produced 27 meetings.

“Recruiting a company is a pretty long term process, usually five years or more. But it has to start somewhere and that starting point is to get a company interested in you,” Ballew said. “Using targeted leads from RCI, we have had really great success in getting companies looking at our region and interested in getting more information and visiting. I’ve been doing this for twenty years, and our Alliance shows have been the best I’ve seen.”

For Adams County, with a brand new business recruitment effort, the Alliance offers critical support.

“This focused, targeted business recruitment effort is a vital new venture for Adams County. As we implement the county’s economic development efforts, we benefit greatly from the Alliance,” McFadden said. “The collective experience of the members creates a dynamic sales team capable of promoting the Eastern Washington region. The collaborative effort allows all of us to become more aware of our neighbors while perfecting our regional message.”

Braunwart sees value in the Alliance effort, even when Grant County is unable to take part in a specific recruitment effort. Each Alliance member works to promote the entire region.

“This is such a huge perk of our Alliance,” Braunwart said. “This year, the GCEDC, was short staffed, so we had to make a lot of hard decisions for our current staff’s time and be very careful about our budget. Because of this, we were not able to make it to all the shows we would have liked to. But since we have the Alliance, we have been able to sleep easy knowing that our partners are still getting our story out there.”

The Alliance, via targeted outreach, effectively combats a common myth.

“While Seattle gets a lot of attention, you will find bright, hard-working people throughout the state and definitely here in Eastern Washington” Ballew said.

Gaining an audience with more companies, improves the odds. The Alliance members benefit when they can

double or triple the amount of outreach achieved in a given year. For every member of the team, ultimate goal is to land a brand new employer.

“These efforts make sure we communicate the benefits of the region and it allows us to have more conversations than any of us could individually,” Smith concluded. “We don’t pretend to be the perfect business location for all companies. Eastern Washington has very unique and specific attributes that give it a competitive advantage for certain industries. These are the businesses we are seeking to connect with so we can show them how they can be successful here.”

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**For additional information**, please contact any member of the Alliance, identified on Page 1.