

MARION COUNTY FY 2011-12 BUDGET  
APPENDIX Q  
COUNTY AND COUNTY GOVERNMENT PROFILE

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**Profile of the Government**

Marion County, then called Champoick, was created in 1843 by the Provisional Government 16 years before Oregon gained statehood on February 14, 1859. In 1849 the name was changed to Marion honoring American Revolutionary General Francis Marion. The County is located in the heart of the Willamette Valley, and the Willamette River was established as its western boundary in 1856. Salem, the county seat and state capital, is one of the valley's oldest cities.

There are 20 incorporated cities and 37 unincorporated communities in Marion County, and the County's population is currently estimated at 320,640. The County's present boundary encompasses 1,194 square miles. The County is empowered to levy a property tax on both real and personal properties located within its boundaries.

The County is governed by a three-member Board of Commissioners. The commissioners are elected to four-year staggered terms from the County at large, and a chair and vice chair are selected annually. Policy-making, legislative authority and quasi-judicial powers are vested in the Board of Commissioners, which is responsible, among other things, for passing ordinances, adopting the budget, appointing committees, and hiring the Chief Administrative Officer and the heads of various departments. The Chief Administrative Officer is responsible for carrying out the policies of the Board of Commissioners and overseeing the day-to-day operations of the County.

The County provides a full range of services including elections, property assessment and taxation, public and behavioral health, law enforcement, corrections, prosecution, justice courts, supervision of juvenile offenders, road and bridge maintenance and construction, emergency management, dog licensing and control, parks maintenance, solid waste disposal, and environmental services. Low-income housing and certain sewer and lighting services are provided through legally separate entities, which function, in essence, as part of Marion County.

**Local Economy**

Marion County is the largest producer of agriculture among Oregon's 36 counties. Marion County's economy is also based on government and education. In addition to the state capitol, 38 state agencies are located in Marion County, providing employment to approximately 19,000 employees. Marion County and the City of Salem each employ about 1,500 workers and the County's ten public school districts employ about 6,500 workers. As of September 2010, the unemployment rate in Marion County was 11.5 percent, essentially unchanged from 11.6 percent last year, and somewhat higher than the state average of 10.5 percent and the national average of 9.6 percent.

**Financial Position**

The County heads into fiscal year 2011-12 with an acceptable financial position and a low ratio of outstanding debt to the real market value of taxable property within the County. Major long-term concerns for the County include the economic recession, reductions in federal and state funding, decelerating property tax revenues, declines in building inspection and recording fees, rising employee benefit costs, fluctuating energy prices, and pressing capital needs.

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