OREGON WORKFORCE INVESTMENT:
Results & Trends

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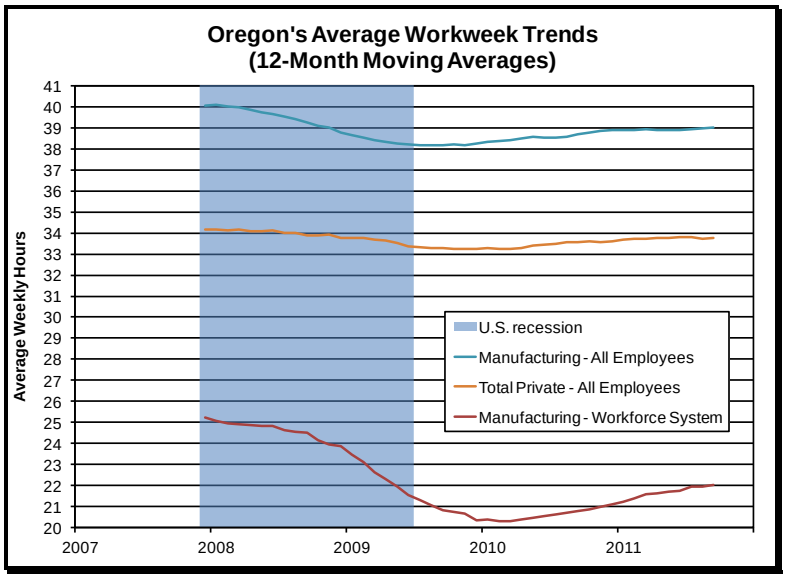
There are many ways to evaluate the economy. One is measuring how many hours people work in an average week. Economists use this data like a doctor uses a thermometer. If employees are working around 40 hours a week, the economy is considered "healthy." If weekly hours are declining, that's cause for concern.

The Oregon Workforce system measures the workweek of its clients, to see how they are faring in their new jobs. Comparing the data with the economy at large gives further insight. The weekly hours of manufacturing workers will stand as an example.



The manufacturing sector currently employs about 10 percent of Oregon's workforce. According to the latest data from the Oregon Workforce system, 7,740 individuals got a manufacturing job during the 3rd quarter of 2011 after receiving services. This was about 8 percent of the individuals placed by the system at that time.

The 2007 to 2009 national recession reduced the workweek of manufacturing employees. The Oregon Employment department analyzed this in an article by economist David Cooke. At the start of 2007, the average worker put in just over 40 hours a week. By the recession's end, that average had fallen almost two hours. By 2011, the workweek had recovered to 39 hours a week.

Despite this setback, the manufacturing workweek remained longer than the average for the private sector.

Two facts jump out when we compare data for manufacturing workers placed by the Workforce system. First, the length of the average workweek suggests workers were placed into part-time jobs. Second, the recession diminished the workweek from just more than 25 hours a week to nearly 20 hours – more than twice the reduction for all manufacturing workers.

The manufacturing sector underwent a major contraction during the past recession. Seasonally adjusted data shows that from December 2007 through June 2009, 37,300 jobs disappeared – an 18 percent loss. The workers who remained faced a marked reduction in their weekly hours. Despite these circumstances some people were able to find work in the sector, through the Oregon Workforce system. Happily, the weekly hours for manufacturing workers have been recovering since the end of the recession.