

# Rural Migration News

## Blog 247

NOVEMBER 2021

### Pennsylvania Agriculture and Labor

Pennsylvania had almost 53,000 farms in 2019, including 1,325 or 2.5 percent that had sales of \$1 million or more. Over 10 percent of the state’s farms are in Lancaster county, including almost a quarter of the state’s 6,900 dairies, 10 percent of the state’s 23,000 cattle farms, and a seventh of the state’s 11,000 poultry farms.

Pennsylvania’s farm sales totaled \$9 billion in 2019, up from \$8 billion in 2017, including two thirds from livestock commodities. The lead-

ing commodity was milk worth \$2 billion in 2019, followed by cattle and calves worth \$1.4 billion, hogs worth \$330 million, broilers worth \$400 million, and eggs worth \$450 million. Pennsylvania is second to Wisconsin in the number of dairy farms, but its dairy farms are smaller, with an average 75 dairy cows compared to 175 cows in the average US dairy.

The 2017 COA reported that 4,000 PA farms harvested 36,000 acres of fresh vegetables, 2,000 farms

harvested 38,000 acres of fruit, and 1,800 farms harvested 2,300 acres of berries, for a total of 7,800 fruit and vegetable farms. The leading fruit and vegetable commodities included:

- Mushrooms: 477 million pounds of fresh market mushrooms worth \$1 a pound or \$515 million. Pennsylvania has 110 mushroom farming operations with 17 million square feet, and produces half of US mushrooms.
- Apples: 20,000 acres produce 500 million pounds worth \$0.21 a pound or \$105 million. Traditionally, over half of the state’s apples were processed, but newer plantings are destined for the fresh market.

The value of peaches and grapes was about \$25 million each.

#### Labor

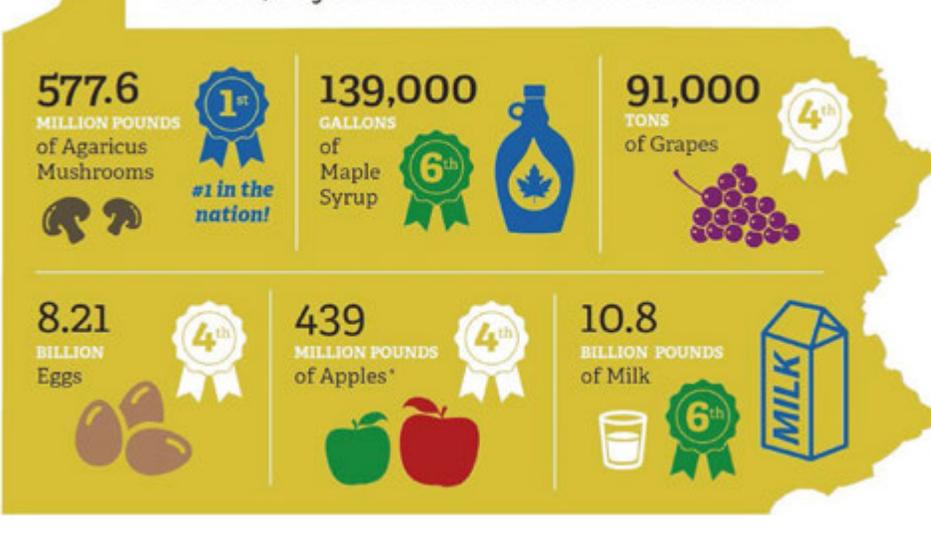
Average UI-covered employment in PA crop agriculture has been stable at 13,400, but the mushroom share of average crop employment has fallen from almost half to a third, with most of the decrease after 2015. The share of average crop employment in apples has been stable at about 10 percent.

Average weekly earnings in PA crops were \$720 in 2020, and highest in mushrooms at \$870, a 20 percent mushroom wage premium. Average weekly wages in apples were lower than average weekly wages in all crops, less than \$600 a week in 2020.

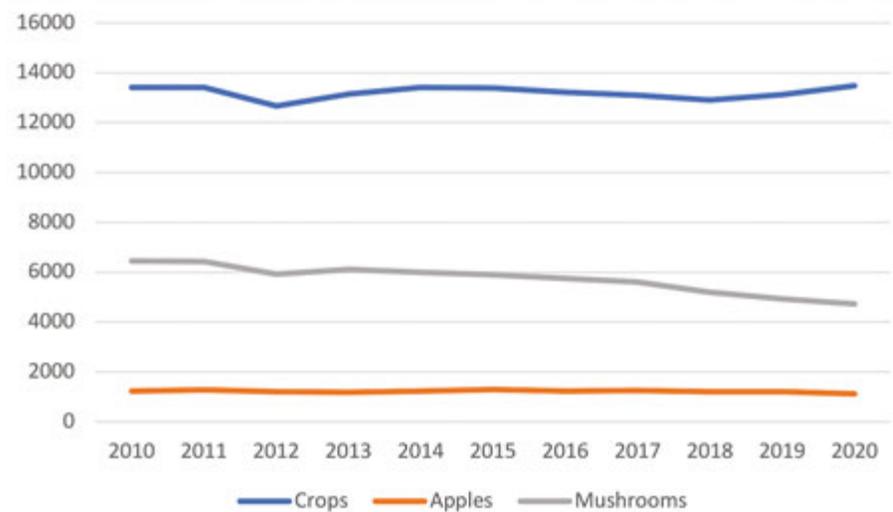
Kennett Square in southeastern Pennsylvania, the mushroom capital of the world, has about 50 mushroom farms. Mushroom seeds or spores are inserted into a compost of mulch, hay, and straw that is fed into shelves by machine and covered with a two inch casing of wet

#### Pennsylvania is the Leading U.S. Producer of Mushrooms

In 2016, Keystone State Farmers Produced...

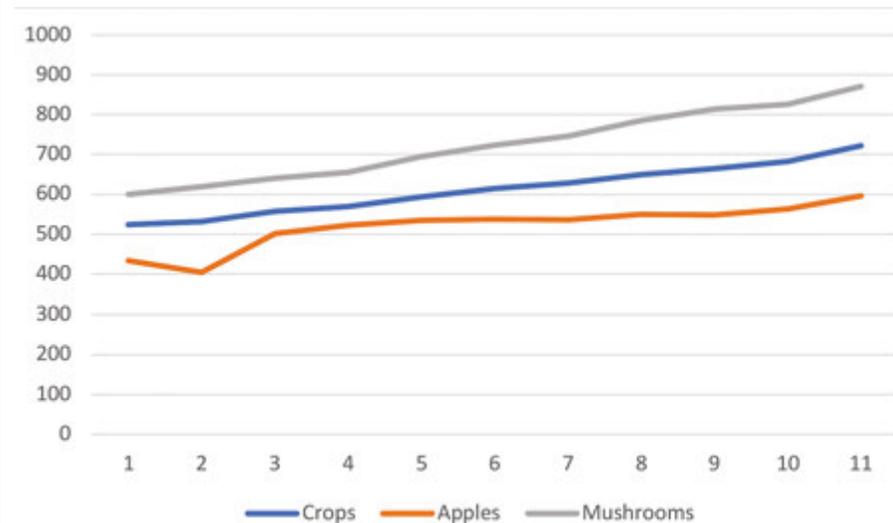


**Average UI-Covered Crop Employment in Pennsylvania was Stable at 13,400, 2010-20**



Many respondents reported labor shortages due to workers fearful of contracting covid at work, an inability to work due to school and child care closures, and competition from other industries for workers. An inability to attract and retain hired farm workers was cited as a persisting challenge during the recovery from covid.

**Average Weekly Earnings are Highest in Pennsylvania Mushrooms at \$870 in 2020**



peat moss and lime. The mushrooms are ready to harvest in 15 to 20 days. Each shelf is harvested two or three times by workers who use knives to cut the 220 ripe mushrooms needed to fill a 10-pound box. Workers harvesters an average 10 boxes an hour, and some work 10 to 12 hours a day to keep up with mushrooms that can double in size in a day. Growers receive \$1 a pound for mushrooms.

Monterey Mushrooms, which has growing facilities throughout the US, employs about 4,000 workers

to produce 250 million pounds of mushrooms a year. Mechanizing the harvest of mushrooms would require redesigning plant beds and developing varieties that ripen uniformly.

**Covid**

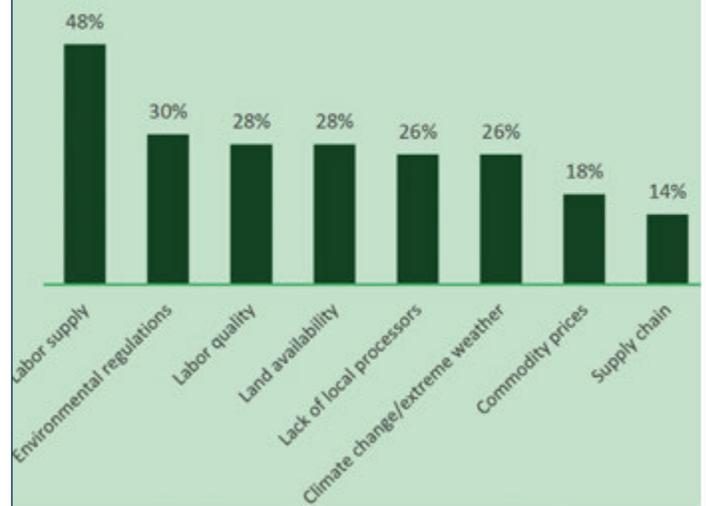
Surveys suggest that labor is a major concern of Pennsylvania growers. A winter 2020 survey found that 60 percent said that labor availability was a top concern before covid, and 28 percent complained of poor labor quality.

### Workers Harvest About 100 Pounds of Mushrooms an Hour



### 48% of Pennsylvania Farmers Said Labor Supply Would be a Major Issue After Covid

Q: What are the biggest future threats or challenges that the agricultural industry is facing in PA? (Select up to 5)



### 60% of Pennsylvania Farmers Thought Labor Available was a Challenge Before Covid

Q: Prior to the COVID crisis, what were the most significant factors impacting the success of agriculture in PA? (Select up to 5)

Top Selections (% of respondents selecting as one of five)

- 1 Labor Supply (60%)
- 2 Commodity Prices (38%)
- 3 Environmental Regulations (30%)
- 4 Lack of Local Processors (28%)
- 5 Labor Quality (28%)

### References

Agriculture in Pennsylvania: 2021 Update.

[https://teampa.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/TeamPA\\_Agriculture2020EISUpdate\\_FINAL-1.pdf](https://teampa.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/TeamPA_Agriculture2020EISUpdate_FINAL-1.pdf)

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