

Rural Migration News

Blog 277

MAY 2022

Texas Agriculture and Labor

Texas has more farms, 248,400 in the 2017 COA, and more cattle, over 12 million, than any other state. Texas farm sales were \$25 billion in 2017, including \$18 billion from livestock and \$7 billion from crops. The 3,400 Texas farms with annual sales of \$1 million or more, 1.4 percent of the state's farms, accounted for three-fourths of Texas farm sales.

Texas has 254 counties, and the state is divided into 10 agricultural districts, some with north and south sub-districts. The largest counties by area are in the state's southwest; Brewster with 6,200 square miles is the largest, followed by Pecos with 4,800 square miles.

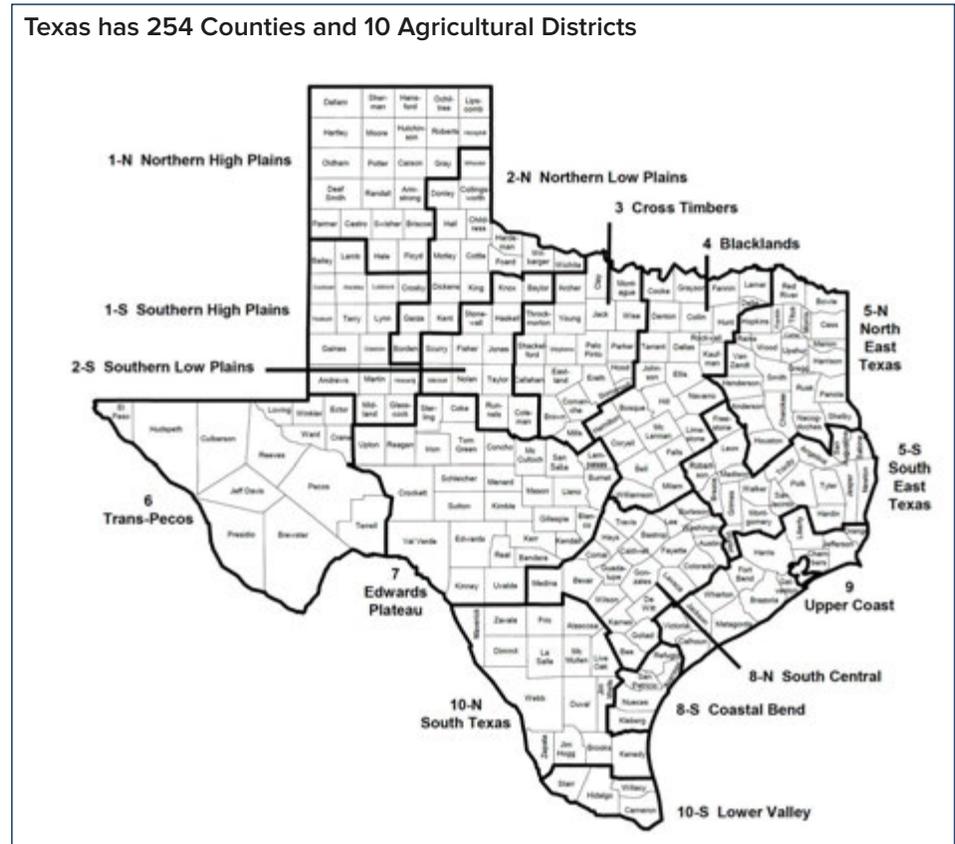
The leading commodities by sales were cattle and calves worth \$12.3 billion in 2017 or half of total farm sales, followed by broiler chickens worth \$1.9 billion and milk worth \$2.1 billion. The leading crops were cotton worth \$2.6 billion from five million acres, corn worth \$1.1 billion from 2.2 million acres, nursery products worth \$0.8 billion, sorghum worth \$0.5 billion, and fruits and vegetables worth \$0.6 billion.

COA Table 12 reported that Texas had 153,000 cattle farms with 12.6 million head of cattle in 2017, including 203 farms that each had 5,000 or more cows and a total of 3.8 million or 30 percent of the state's total herd. Texas had 4.6 million beef cattle, 532,000 milk cows, and

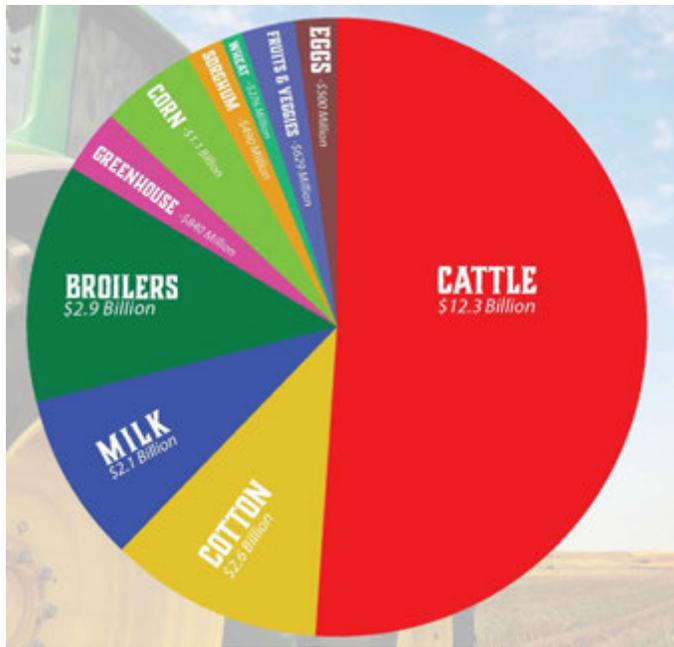
7.5 million other animals, including 730,000 sheep and 840,000 goats. Texas has a rising number of cattle farms, 153,000 in 2017, a shrinking number of dairies, under 500, a shrinking number of hog farms, fewer than 6,000, and a rising number of sheep farms, almost 15,000. Some 230,000 sheep were shorn in Texas in 2019, when the average fleece weighed 7.4 pounds and was worth about \$15, generating 1.7 million pounds of wool worth \$1.90 a pound.

On January 1, 2020, some three million cattle were being fattened in Texas feed lots that each had 1,000 or more head of cattle. There were 735,000 sheep and lambs worth an average \$183 each on Texas farms, and another 765,000 goats on January 1, 2020.

Texas is a large state with 127 million acres of farm land, including 88 million acres of pasture and range land. There were 29.4 million acres of crop land in 2017, but only



Cattle Sales Accounted for Half of Texas's \$25 Billion in Farm Sales in 2017



labor expenses accounted for 44 percent of total contract labor expenses.

Labor expense data suggest that fewer than 3,000 Texas farms, six percent of the 51,000 Texas farms with labor expenses, account for most of Texas farm labor expenses.

COA Table 7 reported that 51,000 farms hired 144,000 workers directly in 2017, and the 1,500 farms that each hired 10 or more workers directly hired a total of 37,400, accounting for 26 percent of workers hired. Most of the workers who were hired directly were seasonal, 85,000, compared with 57,000 workers who were employed on the responding farm 150 days or more. The COA asks farmers if their workers are migrants, and 1,300 Texas farms reported hiring 4,500 migrants directly in 2017.

Estimates prepared for the National Center for Farmworker Health report a higher number of workers than the Census of Agriculture data, even though the COA double counts workers employed on two or more farms. The NCFH estimated 71,467 crop workers and 124,267 livestock workers, for a total of 195,734 or 35 percent more than the COA's 144,000. Some of this gap may reflect NCFH efforts to count workers who are brought to farms by FLCs and other nonfarm employers.

18 million acres were harvested, including all of the 4.4 million acres of irrigated crop land.

The 4,000 largest Texas farms, those with 5,000 acres or more, had 63 million acres or half of Texas farm land. These 4,000 farms also had 4.7 million acres or a quarter of the state's harvested crop land and 1.3 million or 30 percent of the state's irrigated land. Fewer than 4,000 of the state's almost 250,000 farms, less than two percent, account for most Texas's farm land and farm sales.

Labor

COA Table 4 reported that 51,000 Texas farms, about 20 percent of the state's farms, had \$1.7 billion in expenses for hired farm labor in 2017. Another 28,000 farms (often the same farms that hired workers directly) reported \$290 million in contract labor expenses, for total farm labor expenses of \$2 billion for hired farm workers. The 2,800 farms that each had \$100,000 or more in farm labor expenses accounted for two-thirds of total direct hire labor expenses, and the 1,000 farms (often the same farms) with \$50,000 or more in contract

230,000 Texas Sheep were Sheared in 2019

Wool Production and Value - Texas: 2015-2019

Year	Number of Sheep Shorn	Weight per Fleece	Wool Production	Price per Pound	Value of Production ¹
	head	pounds	pounds	dollars	dollars
2015	270,000	7.20	1,950,000	1.64	3,198,000
2016	260,000	6.90	1,800,000	1.75	3,150,000
2017	240,000	7.50	1,800,000	1.63	2,934,000
2018	240,000	7.30	1,760,000	1.80	3,168,000
2019	230,000	7.40	1,700,000	1.90	3,230,000

Some 51,000 Texas Farms Reported Hiring 144,000 Workers Directly in 2017 and Paying them \$1.7 Billion

Table 7. Hired Farm Labor - Workers and Payroll: 2017

[For meaning of abbreviations and symbols, see introductory text.]

Item	Texas	Anderson	Andrews	Angelina	Aransas
Hired farm labor					
farms	50,892	357	33	160	15
workers	143,763	861	86	332	(D)
\$1,000 payroll	1,736,122	7,888	1,275	1,586	191
Farms with-					
1 worker	22,588	155	9	69	3
workers	22,588	155	9	69	3
2 workers	13,386	119	12	57	8
workers	26,772	238	24	114	16
3 or 4 workers	8,987	51	9	24	3
workers	30,347	171	28	77	(D)
5 to 9 workers	4,399	23	2	9	1
workers	26,619	130	(D)	(D)	(D)
10 workers or more	1,532	9	1	1	-
farms	37,437	167	(D)	(D)	-
workers					
Workers by days worked:					
150 days or more	21,752	116	19	72	6
farms	58,706	293	45	116	(D)
workers					
Farms with-					
1 worker	11,780	64	5	41	-
workers	11,780	64	5	41	-
2 workers	5,143	33	8	24	4
workers	10,286	66	16	48	8
3 or 4 workers	2,924	10	5	5	1
workers	9,742	34	(D)	(D)	(D)
5 to 9 workers	1,230	5	1	2	1
workers	7,468	28	(D)	(D)	(D)
10 workers or more	675	4	-	-	-
farms	19,430	101	-	-	-
workers					
Less than 150 days	37,106	277	19	113	9
farms	85,057	568	41	216	(D)
workers					
Farms with-					
1 worker	18,410	123	8	55	3
workers	18,410	123	8	55	3
2 workers	9,485	92	5	40	4
workers	18,970	184	10	80	8
3 or 4 workers	6,088	41	5	16	2
workers	20,359	135	(D)	59	(D)
5 to 9 workers	2,438	18	1	1	-
workers	14,385	96	(D)	(D)	-
10 workers or more	685	3	-	1	-
farms	12,933	30	-	(D)	-
workers					
Reported only workers working					
150 days or more	13,786	80	14	47	6
farms	34,989	198	35	75	19
workers	877,945	4,239	755	832	173
\$1,000 payroll					
Reported only workers working					
less than 150 days	29,140	241	14	88	9
farms	59,468	444	26	168	(D)
workers	190,206	908	302	468	18
\$1,000 payroll					
Reported both - workers working					
150 days or more and workers					
working less than 150 days	7,966	36	5	25	-
farms	23,717	95	10	41	-
150 days or more, workers	25,589	124	15	48	-
less than 150 days, workers	667,971	2,741	218	286	-
\$1,000 payroll					
Total migrant workers	1,610	4	2	2	-
farms	5,394	9	(D)	(D)	-
workers					
Migrant farm labor on farms with hired labor	1,256	2	2	2	-
farms	4,554	(D)	(D)	(D)	-
workers					
Migrant farm labor on farms reporting only					
contract labor	354	2	-	-	-
farms	840	(D)	-	-	-
workers					
Unpaid workers	123,579	906	61	579	46
farms	274,711	2,058	133	1,196	102
workers					

The NCFH data identify three counties that each have 5,000 farm workers or more and 10 that have 2,000 to 3,000 workers each. These 13 counties had almost 38,000 farm workers or 20 percent of the state's total, and differed in their mix of crop and livestock workers. Hidalgo in the Rio Grande Valley, where almost 60 percent of the \$311 million in farm sales in 2017 were from FVH commodities, included over 80 percent crop

workers. In Karnes county in south central Texas, two-thirds of the \$29 million in farm sales in 2017 were from cattle and calves, and over 80 percent of workers were livestock workers.

An alternative source of farm labor data is the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, which reports the employment and earnings of workers who are employed on farms that must participate in

unemployment insurance. Texas requires agricultural employers who hire at least three employees for at least an hour a day for 20 weeks in a calendar year, who pay at least \$6,250 in cash wages in a calendar quarter, and/or who employ a seasonal worker in a truck farm, orchard, or vineyard, and/or who employ a migrant or seasonal worker, to enroll in the state's UI system and to pay taxes on the wages earned by employees. The

13 Countries Accounted for 20% of Texas's Estimated 196,000 Farm Workers

County	Total Crop Workers	Total Livestock Workers	Total Workers	Total Dependents	Total Workers and Dependents	Total Dependents 17 and Under
Hidalgo	4,626	1,192	5,817	8,379	14,196	4,726
Karnes	901	4,843	5,744	8,273	14,017	4,666
Lamb	4,062	647	4,709	6,783	11,492	3,826
Lynn	2,939	90	3,029	4,364	7,393	2,461
Val Verde	427	2,043	2,470	3,558	6,029	2,007
Comal	118	2,194	2,312	3,330	5,643	1,879
Waller	1,362	882	2,244	3,231	5,475	1,823
Parker	505	1,465	1,969	2,837	4,806	1,600
Wharton	1,322	641	1,963	2,828	4,791	1,595
Van Zandt	907	1,007	1,914	2,757	4,671	1,555
Gonzales	384	1,524	1,908	2,748	4,656	1,550
Collin	806	1,055	1,861	2,680	4,541	1,512
Throckmorton	218	1,599	1,818	2,618	4,436	1,477

The purpose of the Bowen report was to survey the availability of and need for MSFW housing. Bowen estimated that there was housing for 2,500 of the 31,000 low-income MSFWs in Texas, leaving a housing gap for 28,500 MSFWs, many of whom likely paid a high share of their income in rent.

UI-covered employment in Texas agriculture declined 10 percent between 2000 and 2020 to an average 57,300. However, crop employment declined by over 20 percent, and crop support employment fell by over 40 percent, while livestock employment increased by 25 percent. The decline in crop employment and the rise in cattle employment likely reflects mechanization in crop production and fewer and larger livestock operations that depend on hired workers.

Direct-hire employment in livestock rose by 25 percent and employment in animal support services rose by 45 percent. There were 15 full-time equivalent jobs on animal farms for each FTE job in animal support in 2020, down from 18 to one in 2001. By contrast, the ratio of direct-hire crop to crop support rose to 2.3 by 2020, that is, there were 2.3 direct-hire workers for each crop support worker.

Most of the growth in livestock employment occurred between 2010 and 2020, while most of the decline in crop and crop support employment occurred between 2001 and 2010. The number of ag establishments registered with UI was stable at about 10,000, including 4,600 in livestock and 500 in livestock support.

The average weekly wages of UI-covered workers were higher in support services and lower for workers who were hired directly by farm establishments. In 2020, average weekly wages were \$895 in

Hidalgo County had the Most Farm Workers in Texas, and is Primarily a Crop County

Hidalgo County Texas

Total and Per Farm Overview, 2017 and change since 2012

	2017	% change since 2012
Number of farms	2,436	+13
Land in farms (acres)	623,875	-22
Average size of farm (acres)	256	-30

Total (\$)

	2017	% change since 2012
Market value of products sold	311,030,000	-31
Government payments	6,631,000	-27
Farm-related income	18,114,000	-12
Total farm production expenses	257,731,000	-33
Net cash farm income	78,043,000	-20

1 Percent of state agriculture sales

Share of Sales by Type (%)

Crops	94
Livestock, poultry, and products	6

Land in Farms by Use (%) *

Cropland	57
Pastureland	31
Woodland	8
Other	4

wages paid to H-2A workers are exempt from UI taxes.

Bowen National Research used 2010 UI data to estimate that Texas had 34,520 migrant and seasonal farm workers in 49 counties in 2010, including a third in the High Plains or the Texas Panhandle area in the northwestern part of the state. Another 15 percent of MSFWs were

in south Texas counties, 15 percent were in west Texas, and the remaining 40 percent were in the state's other counties. Of these 34,520 MSFWs, 18,300 were reported and 16,200 were "estimated" by Bowen. The most important crops grown in the regions studied by Bowen were cotton in the High Plains and west Texas and sorghum for grain in south Texas.

livestock support and \$865 in crop support, compared with \$805 for direct hires in livestock and \$695 for direct hires in crops. Livestock support wages were 11 percent higher and crop support wages were 20 percent higher than for directly hired workers in livestock and crops, respectively.

The weekly wages of UI-covered crop workers across the US were \$732 in 2020 or two percent more than the \$715 of US crop support workers. The average weekly wages of US livestock workers were \$815 or three percent more than the \$790 of US livestock support workers.

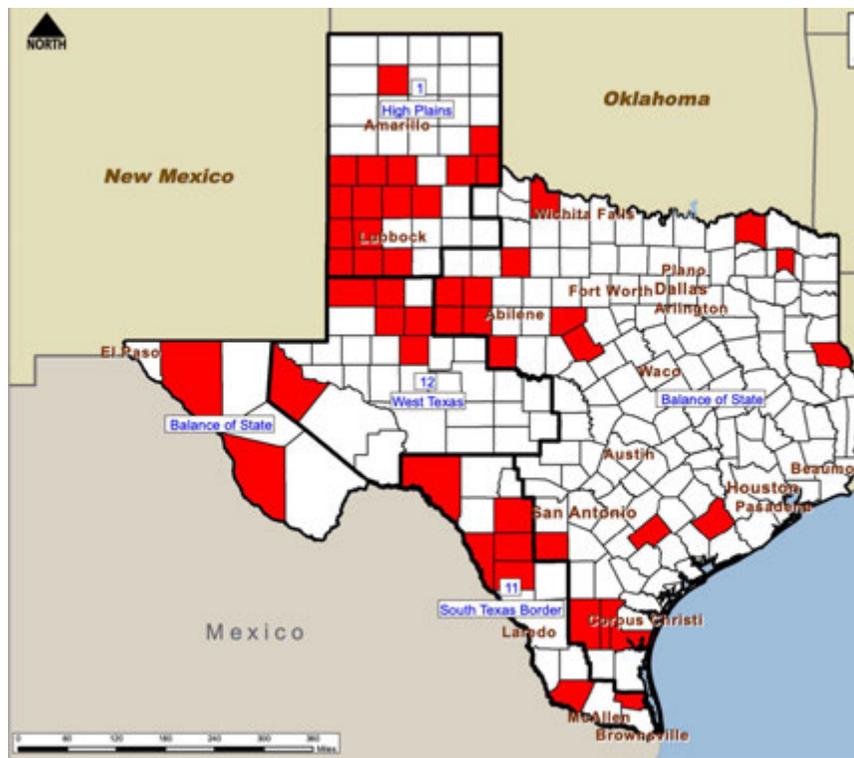
Texas livestock support wages have always been higher than direct-hire livestock wages, and the support premium has varied from one to 20 percent over the past two decades. Weekly crop support wages were lower than direct hire wages in the early 2000s but, after surpassing direct-hire crop wages in 2004, the crop support premium increased.

Fruits and Vegetables

The leading fruits by sales were grapefruit worth \$65 million in 2019 and oranges and wine grapes, each worth about \$23 million. Texas vegetable acreage has been shrinking; there were 50,000 acres harvested in 2019 that produced fresh and processing vegetables worth less than \$200 million. Total fruit and vegetable sales were almost \$350 million in 2017.

Texas has an elected agriculture commissioner, currently Sid Miller, who announced plans to run for a third term in 2022. Miller is a Trump supporter who criticized Governor Greg Abbott for implementing restrictions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in 2020.

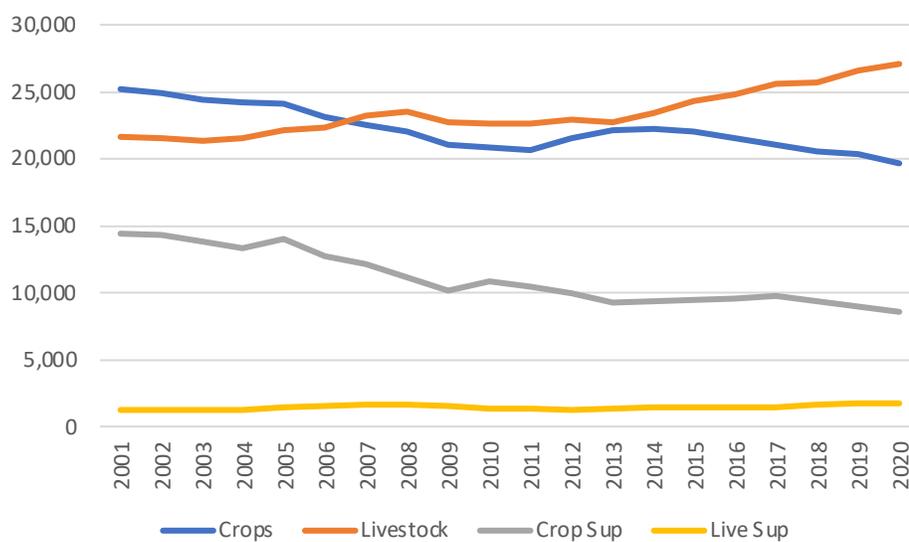
Bowen Estimated that Texas had 40 Counties with 1,000 or more MSFWs in 2010



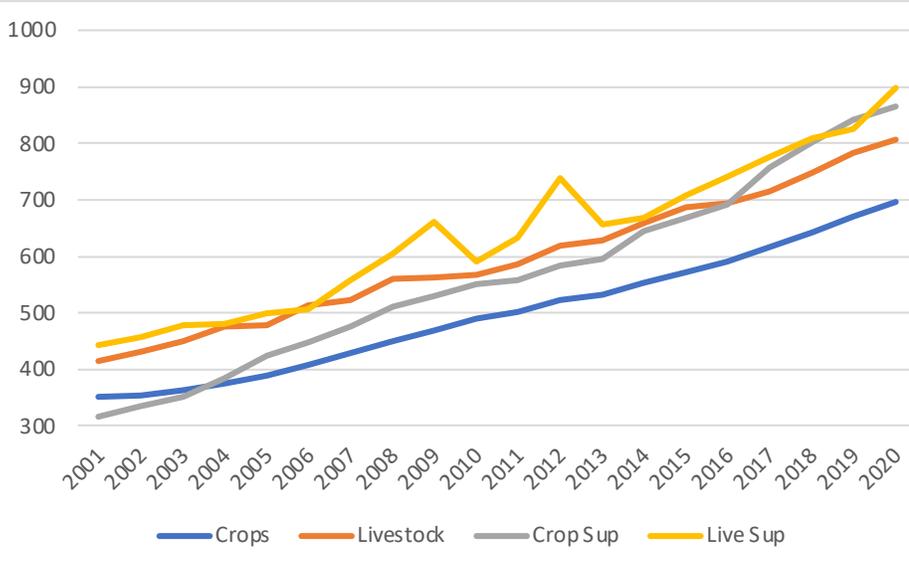
Texas Counties with 1,000 or more MSFWs in 2010

Counties with 1,000+ Farmworkers by TDHCA Region			
Region 1 High Plains			
Bailey	Collingsworth	Hockley	Parmer
Castro	Floyd	Lamb	Swisher
Childress	Hale	Lynn	Terry
Cochran	Hall	Moore	Yoakum
Region 11 South Texas Border			
Dimmit	Starr	Val Verde	Zavala
Maverick	Uvalde	Willacy	
Region 12 West Texas			
Dawson	Glasscock	Martin	-
Gaines	Howard	Reeves	-
Balance of State			
Comanche	Frio	Lamar	Scurry
DeWitt	Haskell	Mitchell	Shelby
Duval	Hudspeth	Nolan	Titus
Eastland	Jim Wells	Presidio	Wharton
Fisher	Kleberg	Runnels	Wilbarger

Average Employment in Texas Ag Declined 10 Percent since 2000, but Rose for Livestock and Fell in Crops



Average Weekly Wages for Support Workers Rose Faster than for Direct Hires



References

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Texas A&M. 2016. Facts about Texas and US Agriculture. <https://agecoext.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/CoversAndIntro.pdf>

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