

Rural Migration News

Blog 285

JUNE 2022

H-2A Expands; Wages Rise

DOL certified 193,200 jobs to be filled with H-2A workers in the first two quarters of FY22, up 16 percent from 166,000 jobs certified in the first two quarters of FY21. DOL could certify over 350,000 jobs in FY22, up from 317,600 in FY21.

During the first two quarters of FY21, FL accounted for 14 percent of H-2A job certifications, CA 13 percent, GA 11 percent, WA eight percent, and NC seven percent; the top five states accounted for over half of all H-2A certifications. The NC Growers Association was the largest H-2A recruiter with almost 5,900 jobs certified, followed by CA's Fresh Harvest with 3,800 jobs, CA's Foot-hill with 3,600, and CA's Elkhorn with 2,400 jobs. Eight of the top 10 employers in the first half of FY22 were FLCs.

CA, OR, and WA have about half of US farm worker employment and a fifth of H-2A job certifications, suggesting that the H-2A program is likely to grow fastest in the western states. H-2A workers are the highest share of farm workers in the southeastern states.

FLS

USDA's FLS surveys only farm operators, while DOL's QCEW obtains employment and earnings data only from nonfarm employers, including labor contractors and other nonfarm businesses that bring workers to farms. The FLS estimated 630,000 directly hired workers employed on US farms in April 2022. Over 80 percent of these directly hired workers were employed 150 or more days on the responding farm, and over 20 percent of US FLS farm worker employment was in California.

All hired workers (including supervisors) earned an average \$17.22

Most of the top 10 H-2A states are not among the top 10 farm worker states

Review of Positions Certified FY 2022 Q1-Q2 (% of total certified FY 2022 Q1-Q2)			
Top 10 States of Employment	Florida	26,677	13.8%
	California	24,428	12.6%
	Georgia	20,412	10.6%
	Washington	16,033	8.3%
	North Carolina	12,895	6.7%
	Louisiana	7,620	3.9%
	Arizona	7,115	3.7%
	Texas	6,951	3.6%
	Michigan	5,795	3.0%
	South Carolina	4,906	2.5%

Top 10 States: Shares of U.S. Farm Workers, 2002, 2007, 2012, and 2017

	2017	2012	2007	2002
California	24.9%	24.8%	29.2%	23.7%
Washington	5.8%	5.7%	4.2%	5.0%
Florida	5.4%	5.0%	7.6%	8.3%
Texas	4.8%	5.2%	5.4%	6.2%
North Carolina	4.3%	3.1%	3.1%	3.3%
Michigan	3.3%	3.1%	2.4%	2.7%
Wisconsin	2.8%	2.9%	2.6%	2.2%
Oregon	2.8%	3.0%	3.1%	3.3%
Minnesota	2.6%	2.7%	1.9%	2.3%
New York	2.4%	2.1%	2.1%	2.2%

Field Workers have Higher Hourly Earnings than Livestock Workers

Hired Workers, Gross Hours Worked by Hired Workers, and Gross Wage Rates – United States

[Excludes agricultural service workers and Alaska]

Farm employment	January 10-16, 2021	April 11-17, 2021	July 11-17, 2021	October 10-16, 2021	January 9-15, 2022	April 10-16, 2022
	(1,000)	(1,000)	(1,000)	(1,000)	(1,000)	(1,000)
Hired workers						
150 days or more	442	506	575	578	420	518
149 days or less	64	107	222	194	87	112
Total	506	613	797	772	507	630
	(hours per week)	(hours per week)	(hours per week)	(hours per week)	(hours per week)	(hours per week)
Gross hours worked by hired workers ...	40.2	40.9	41.0	42.0	39.3	39.7
	(dollars per hour)	(dollars per hour)	(dollars per hour)	(dollars per hour)	(dollars per hour)	(dollars per hour)
Gross wage rates ¹						
Field and livestock combined	15.08	15.06	15.85	15.92	16.37	16.27
Field workers	15.23	15.19	16.10	16.08	16.54	16.50
Livestock workers	14.87	14.81	15.19	15.45	16.12	15.82
All hired workers	16.21	15.97	16.59	16.59	17.63	17.22

¹ Benefits, such as housing and meals, are provided to some workers but the values are not included in the gross wage rates.

There was a \$5 Gap in Hourly Field Worker Earnings Between the Southeast and California

Gross Wage Rates by Type of Worker – Regions and United States: April 10-16, 2022

[Excludes agricultural service workers and Alaska]

Regions ¹ and United States	Type of worker			Gross wage rates for all hired workers
	Field workers	Livestock workers	Field and livestock combined ²	
	(dollars per hour)	(dollars per hour)	(dollars per hour)	(dollars per hour)
Northeast I	17.91	16.36	17.32	18.28
Northeast II	16.92	15.08	16.37	17.59
Appalachian I	15.56	15.06	15.44	16.06
Appalachian II	14.67	14.55	14.62	15.44
Southeast	13.16	12.92	13.11	13.76
Florida	13.85	14.30	13.90	14.61
Lake	17.36	16.22	16.73	17.45
Cornbelt I	17.64	15.77	17.13	17.93
Cornbelt II	17.89	17.92	17.90	18.52
Delta	13.23	13.30	13.25	13.69
Northern Plains	17.43	16.56	16.94	17.63
Southern Plains	14.20	14.56	14.39	15.17
Mountain I	16.34	15.10	15.69	16.35
Mountain II	17.53	15.37	16.43	17.34
Mountain III	15.20	16.39	15.74	16.49
Pacific	17.27	17.64	17.32	18.35
California	18.25	18.35	18.26	19.71
Hawaii	16.50	18.55	16.84	18.95
United States	16.50	15.82	16.27	17.22

an hour, up eight percent from April 2021. Farm employers report gross earnings and hours worked by type of worker so that USDA can calculate average hourly earnings. In April 2022, field workers earned an average \$16.50 and livestock

workers \$15.82 an hour. Ag equipment operators and supervisors had higher hourly earnings.

The average hourly earnings of field workers ranged from a low of less than \$14 an hour in the southeast-

ern states and Florida to about \$18 an hour in California and the northeastern states.

DOL uses the average hourly earnings of field and livestock workers to set AEWRs. The widening spread

in FLS average hourly earnings is reflected in AEWRs for 2022, which ranged from a low of \$12 an hour in southeastern states to over \$17 an hour in the Pacific states.

Over half of FLS directly hired workers were employed on other crop farms, mostly farms growing fruits and vegetables. These other crop workers had higher average hourly earnings than the workers employed on field crop farms in the southeast, but not in CA and the Pacific states. In the Great Lake and corn belt states, workers on field crop farms earned significantly more than workers on other crop farms.

Large farms hire most US farm workers. Two thirds of directly hired US farm workers are employed on farms with \$1 million or more in annual sales, while farms with annual sales of less than \$100,000 employ fewer than 10 percent of directly hired workers.

Farms with higher sales also hire more workers. Half of directly hired workers were employed on US farms that had 20 or more workers, and a third on farms with over 50



workers. By contrast, farms with one or two directly hired workers accounted for a sixth of all hired workers.

Larger farms pay higher wages. Farms with annual sales of \$1 million or more paid \$3 an hour more than farms with sales of less than \$50,000. Average hourly earnings rose in lockstep with annual sales,

with little difference in hourly earnings on farms with annual sales between \$100,000 and \$1 million a year.

Of the 630,000 directly hired workers in April 2022, 264,000 or 42 percent were crop workers, 149,000 or 24 percent were livestock workers, and 105,000 or 17 percent were agricultural equip-

Workers Employed on Other Crop Farms (Fruits and Vegetables) did Not Always Earn More Per Hour than Workers on Field Crop Farms

Combined Field and Livestock Worker Gross Wage Rates by Type of Farm – Regions and 48 States: April 10-16, 2022

[Excludes agricultural service workers]

Regions ¹	Field crop farms (dollars per hour)	Other crop farms (dollars per hour)	Livestock and poultry farms (dollars per hour)	All farms (dollars per hour)
Northeast ²	17.56	17.37	15.59	16.89
Appalachian ³	15.21	15.46	14.56	15.10
Southeast and Florida	13.17	13.47	13.70	13.51
Lake	19.12	16.98	16.22	16.73
Combelt ⁴	19.41	16.99	16.75	17.44
Delta	13.27	13.24	13.01	13.25
Northern Plains	17.75	17.14	16.49	16.94
Southern Plains	13.71	14.39	14.73	14.39
Mountain ⁵	17.88	15.78	15.73	15.92
Pacific and California	18.14	18.00	18.26	18.04
48 States ⁶	15.82	16.64	15.84	16.27

¹ Region map on page 22.

² Includes Northeast I and Northeast II.

³ Includes Appalachian I and Appalachian II.

⁴ Includes Combelt I and Combelt II.

⁵ Includes Mountain I, Mountain II, and Mountain III.

⁶ Excludes Alaska and Hawaii

Two Thirds of Directly Hired Farm Workers were Employed on Farms with \$1 Million or More in Sales

Hired Workers by Economic Class of Farm

[Excludes agricultural service workers, Alaska, and Hawaii]

Gross value of sales	January 10-16, 2021	April 11-17, 2021	July 11-17, 2021	October 10-16, 2021	January 9-15, 2022	April 10-16, 2022
	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)
Less than \$50,000	4	4	7	5	5	5
\$50,000-\$99,999	3	4	4	4	2	3
\$100,000-\$249,999	7	8	7	7	5	7
\$250,000-\$499,999	8	8	9	9	7	7
\$500,000-\$999,999	11	11	11	11	10	11
\$1,000,000 and over	67	65	62	64	71	67

Half of Directly Hired Workers were Employed on Farms with 20 or More Workers

Hired Workers by Number of Workers on Farm

[Excludes agricultural service workers and Alaska]

Number of workers on farm	January 10-16, 2021	April 11-17, 2021	July 11-17, 2021	October 10-16, 2021	January 9-15, 2022	April 10-16, 2022
	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)
1 worker	9	8	8	6	8	7
2 workers	9	7	7	7	8	7
3-6 workers	17	18	16	17	14	16
7-10 workers	7	8	7	8	8	9
11-20 workers	11	12	11	12	12	11
21-50 workers	14	13	13	12	16	15
51 or more workers	33	34	38	38	34	35

Workers on Farms with Higher Annual Sales had Higher Hourly Earnings

All Hired Worker Gross Wage Rates by Economic Class of Farm – Regions and 48 States: April 10-16, 2022

[Excludes agricultural service workers]

Regions ¹	Gross value sales-\$1,000						All farms
	<50	50-99	100-249	250-499	500-999	1,000+	
	(dollars per hour)	(dollars per hour)	(dollars per hour)	(dollars per hour)	(dollars per hour)	(dollars per hour)	(dollars per hour)
Northeast ²	(S)	(S)	14.82	18.47	(S)	18.16	17.97
Appalachian ³	13.08	15.66	13.44	15.61	15.15	16.52	15.80
Southeast and Florida	14.42	13.02	15.04	12.84	13.10	14.39	14.19
Lake	(S)	12.89	14.79	16.65	(S)	17.80	17.45
Combelt ⁴	16.81	(S)	16.32	(S)	17.18	18.48	18.16
Delta	12.56	(S)	13.07	13.99	13.53	13.88	13.69
Northern Plains	(S)	15.13	17.81	(S)	16.44	18.15	17.63
Southern Plains	12.95	(S)	15.54	14.75	15.12	15.86	15.17
Mountain ⁵	(S)	14.43	(S)	14.63	(S)	16.70	16.69
Pacific and California	(S)	20.70	20.60	18.23	18.96	19.36	19.39
48 States ⁶	14.45	16.05	16.85	16.90	16.91	17.53	17.22

(S) Insufficient number of reports to establish an estimate.

¹ Region map on page 22.

² Includes Northeast I and Northeast II.

³ Includes Appalachian I and Appalachian II.

⁴ Includes Combelt I and Combelt II.

⁵ Includes Mountain I, Mountain II, and Mountain III.

⁶ Excludes Alaska and Hawaii.

ment operators.

QCEW

DOL's Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages obtains employment and earnings data from non-

farm employers who participate in unemployment insurance. Most states follow the 10/20 rule, meaning that employers who hire at least 10 workers during 20 weeks, or who pay at least \$20,000 in wages

in a quarter, must enroll in the UI system.

DOL estimates that the average employment of wage and salary workers in US agriculture is 1.5 million. Some 1.2 million or 80 percent

2/3 of the 630,000 Directly Hired Workers in April 2022 were Crop or Livestock Workers

Hired Workers by Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) System

[Excludes agricultural service workers and Alaska]

Title	SOC Code	January 10-16, 2021 (1,000)	April 11-17, 2021 (1,000)	January 9-15, 2022 (1,000)	April 10-16, 2022 (1,000)
Graders and sorters, agricultural products	(45-2041)	9	8	12	12
Agricultural equipment operators	(45-2091)	80	105	86	105
Farmworkers, crop, nursery, and greenhouse	(45-2092)	179	251	175	264
Farmworkers, farm, ranch, and aquacultural animals	(45-2093)	144	153	142	149
Agricultural workers, all other	(45-2099)	7	8	8	8
Packers and packagers, hand	(53-7064)	14	14	10	14
Farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural managers	(11-9013)	20	21	20	21
First-line supervisors of farming, fishing workers	(45-1011)	19	19	18	19

of these year-round equivalent jobs are covered by UI and included in QCEW data, while 300,000 are not. Another 700,000 self-employed farmers and unpaid family members are excluded from UI and the QCEW.

The QCEW reported that 109,000 agricultural establishments had average employment of 1.2 million in 2020, with a high of over 1.3 million jobs in June and a low of 1.1 million jobs in January. Total wages paid were \$49 billion, suggesting an average annual wage of almost \$40,000 for each full-time equivalent job, \$765 a week, or over \$3,000 a month.

QCEW data permit analysis of wage trends by commodity and area. Average weekly wages in US agriculture rose faster between 2016 and 2020 than between 2011 and 2015, and rose especially fast for farm labor contractors. Average weekly wages of FLC employees were much lower than weekly wages for workers hired directly by crop farmers, \$580 versus \$730 in 2020, but rose 10 percent between 2019 and 2020, versus a seven percent increase for directly hired crop workers. Livestock wages are more than 10 percent higher than crop wages, but increased at a slower pace.

The four major commodities that employ most of the US farm workers who are hired directly by farmers are vegetables, apples, grapes, and strawberries (most of the workers who pick oranges are brought to farms by FLCs). Vegetable wages are at the top of the wage hierarchy, \$775 a week in 2020, followed by grapes, \$745 a week, while apples at \$565 a week and strawberries at \$630 were significantly lower. Strawberry wages jumped almost 10 percent between 2011 and 2012, and again between 2015 and 2016, but increased slower since 2016 than wages in the other commodities.

California mirrors the US, with livestock wages higher than crop wages, crop wages higher than crop support and FLC wages, but crop support and FLC wages rising faster since 2016. California FLC wages rose almost 10 percent between 2015 and 2016 and again between 2019 and 2020 to \$585 a week, \$200 less than the \$800 a week paid to directly hired crop workers.

The four major commodities, vegetables, apples, grapes, and strawberries, had wage levels and changes in California that were similar to US wage trends. California's

FLS Farm Labor Regions



California and Washington Require Almost All Farm Employers to Participate in UI

CA	1 at any time and wages in excess of \$100 in a CQ
DC	1 at any time
FL	5 in 20 weeks or \$10,000 in a CQ
MN	4 in 20 weeks or \$20,000 in a CQ; agricultural labor performed by an individual 16 years of age or younger is excluded from agricultural coverage unless the employer is covered under federal law
NY	1 at any time and wages in excess of \$300 in a CQ
PR	1 or more at any time
RI	1 or more at any time
TX	3 in at least 20 different calendar weeks of the calendar year or wages in cash of \$6,250 during a CQ
VI	1 or more at any time
WA	1 or more at any time, excluding workers attending or between terms in school; on corporate farms, does not include services performed by spouses or unmarried children under 18 years of age

Historical Note: When the UI program began, all agricultural labor was excluded from the definition of employment regardless of the size of the agricultural employer. A definition of agricultural labor, added to FUTA in 1939, also excluded from coverage some processing and marketing activities (services performed in the employ of someone other than the farmer) and services in the management and operation of a farm (if they were performed for the farm owner or operator). Amendments made to FUTA in 1970 changed the definition of agricultural labor, effectively extending coverage to some marginal agricultural activities. Additional amendments in 1976 added the current dollar/employment thresholds that resulted in coverage of services performed on large farms.

1976 The Unemployment Compensation Amendments of 1976 that becomes effective January 1, 1978, extends coverage to: agricultural labor for employers with 10 or more workers in 20 weeks or who paid \$20,000 or more in cash wages in any calendar quarter; household workers of employers who paid \$1,000 or more in any calendar quarter for such services; State and local governments with certain minor exceptions; and employees of nonprofit elementary and secondary schools.

Source: <https://oui.doleta.gov/unemploy/pdf/uilawcompar/2021/coverage.pdf> and <https://www.bls.gov/opub/hom/cew/history.htm>

The QCEW Includes 80% of the 1.5 Million Average Employment in Agriculture

Table A. Coverage exclusions in 2020, for selected workers

Group	Number Excluded (in millions)	Number Included (in millions)
Wage and salary agricultural workers	0.3	1.2
Self-employed agricultural workers ¹	0.7	Not covered
Self-employed nonagricultural workers ¹	8.5	Not covered
Domestic workers	0.4	0.2
Unpaid family workers ¹	0.1	Not covered
State and local government workers	0.7	18.2
Railroad workers	0.2	<0.001

Source: <https://www.bls.gov/cew/publications/employment-and-wages-annual-averages/current/home.htm#Employment>

directly hired vegetable workers have the highest weekly wages at \$945, followed by grape workers, \$790, strawberry workers, \$640, and apple workers, \$590 (CA has a small apple industry). California produces over 90 percent of US strawberries and almost all US grapes, so state trends mirror US trends in

these commodities, viz, faster wage growth between 2011 and 2015 than from 2016 to 2020.

Florida has lower weekly wages and more erratic wage changes. As in other states, Florida livestock workers earn more than crop workers, and FLC employees have the

lowest weekly wages, \$465 in 2020 when FL crop workers averaged \$670. The growth in FLC wages was faster between 2011 and 2015 than between 2016 and 2020 despite 10 percent jumps in FLC wages between 2014 and 2015 and again between 2019 and 2020.

During several years, Florida FLC weekly wages fell, as in 2015-16 and again in 2017-18, perhaps reflecting the relatively few Florida FLCs in the state's UI system (FL exempts H-2A workers from the UI program, but CA and WA do not).

Directly hired orange workers had higher weekly wages than vegetable or strawberry workers, earning over \$200 a week more. Workers employed directly by strawberry workers had the lowest weekly wages of \$530 in 2020. It should be noted that Florida does not require employers of H-2A workers to pay UI taxes on H-2A wages, so Florida employment and wage data do not include all of the workers employed in vegetables, oranges, and strawberries.

Livestock wages are higher than crop wages in Washington, but crop support wages are higher than the wages of directly hired crop workers. One reason for high crop support wages in Washington is that many apple and other tree fruit farms pack their own fruit, so that some packinghouse workers are included in Washington crop support employment. Only 20 percent of Washington crop support employment is with FLCs, compared with two-thirds of California crop support employment. Washington FLC weekly wages rose 11 percent between 2019 and 2020, and were up 30 percent between 2016 and 2020.

Washington has a relatively small vegetable sector, with average employment of about 5,000, a

quarter of the average 20,000 employment in apple orchards. The average weekly wages of vegetable workers were significantly higher than the weekly wages of apple, grape, and other berry workers. The vegetable wage premium narrowed during the 2010s, in part due to significant wage jumps in apples and other berries between 2011 and 2015.

Size

Size-of-establishment data are available only for the first three months of the year, only for the US rather than individual states, and only for all agriculture, that is, there are no size-of-establishment data for all crops or apples, oranges, and other commodities.

Most UI-covered ag establishments had fewer than five employees in March 2020. Some 68,000 less-than-five establishments employed an average 109,000 workers in 2020, meaning that the 63 percent of small UI-covered ag employers accounted for nine percent of March UI-covered employment. At the other extreme, 40 US ag employers with 1,000 or more employees in 2020 had average employment of 56,000, so that less than one half of one percent of all ag establishments accounted for almost five percent of March ag employment.

The 1,565 establishments that each had 100 to 999 employees had total employment of 308,000 in March 2020 or 25 percent of average ag employment. The 7,000 establishments with 20 to 49 employees had 213,000 employees in March, 18 percent of average ag employment.

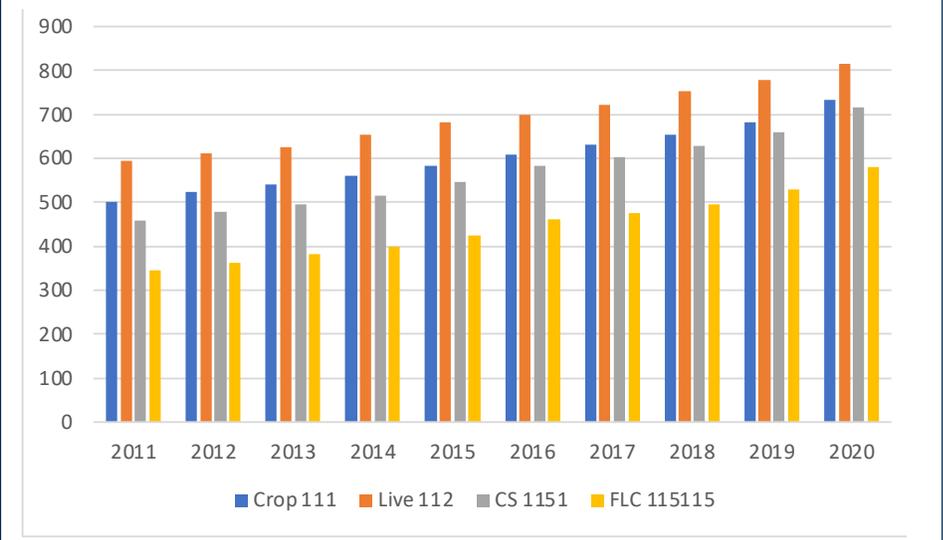
108,000 Agricultural Establishments Offered an Average 1.2 Million Jobs and were Included in QCEW Data in Fall 2019

Table 1. Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) summary data for 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, 2019 4th quarter (in thousands)

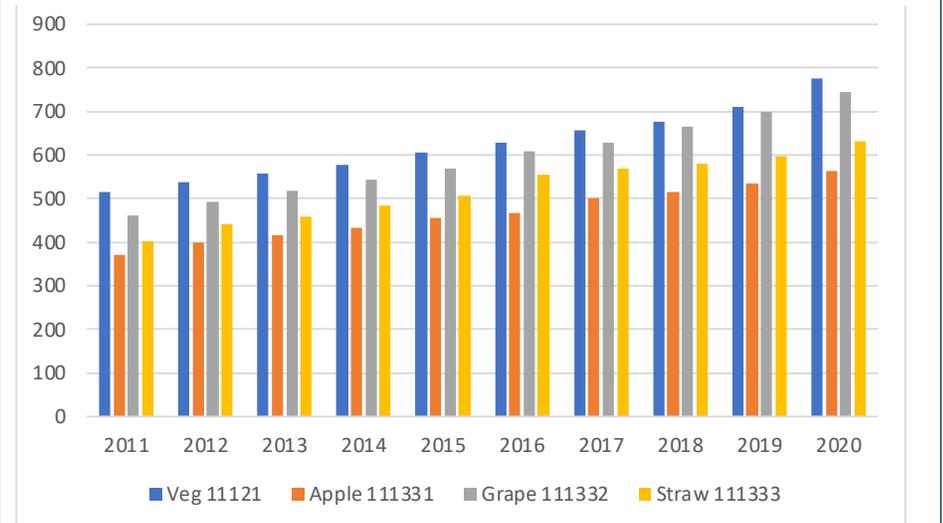
Industry description	Number of establishments	Employment, October 2019	Employment, November 2019	Employment, December 2019
Total	10,364	149,527	150,260	150,005
Total private	9,303	127,321	127,943	127,781
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting	108	1,361	1,251	1,164
Mining	33	665	653	643
Utilities	19	548	548	548
Construction	840	7,661	7,575	7,438
Nondurable manufacturing	135	4,812	4,801	4,802
Durable manufacturing	222	7,971	8,018	8,026
Wholesale trade	618	5,894	5,906	5,914
Retail trade	1,047	15,588	16,072	16,150

Source: <https://www.bls.gov/opub/hom/cew/design.htm>

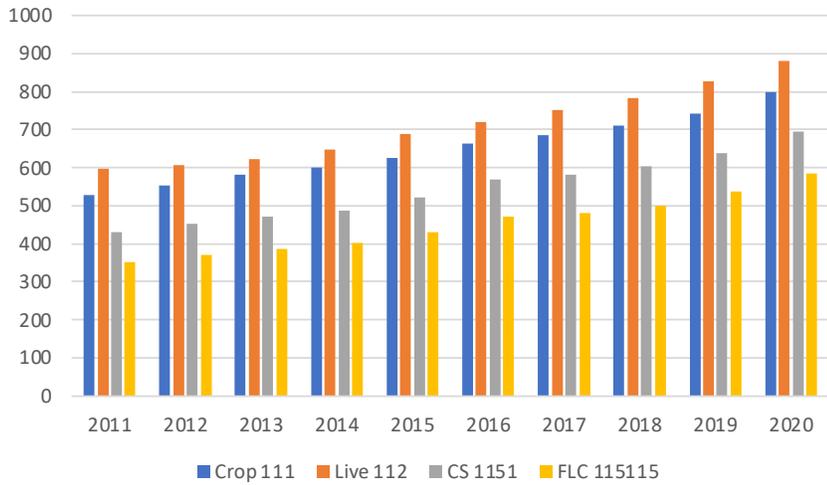
Wages for U.S. Livestock Workers and Directly Hired Crop Workers are Highest (\$/Week)



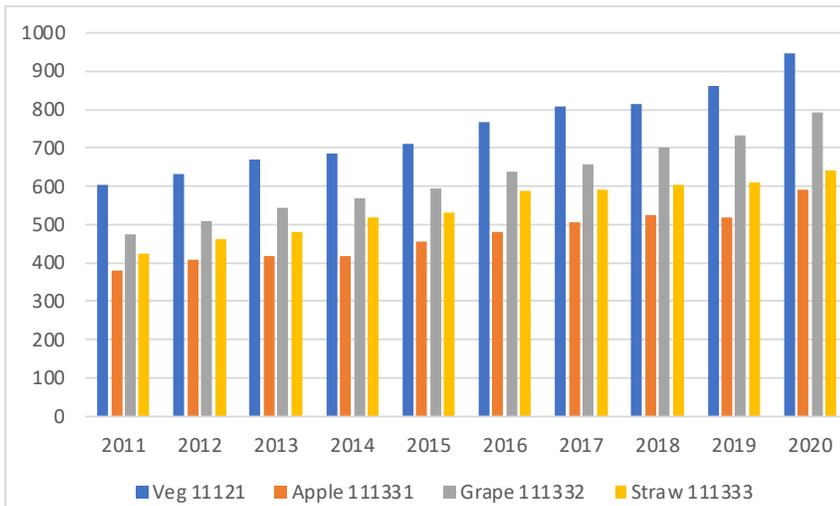
U.S. Vegetable and Grape Wages are Higher than Apple and Strawberry Wages (\$/Week)



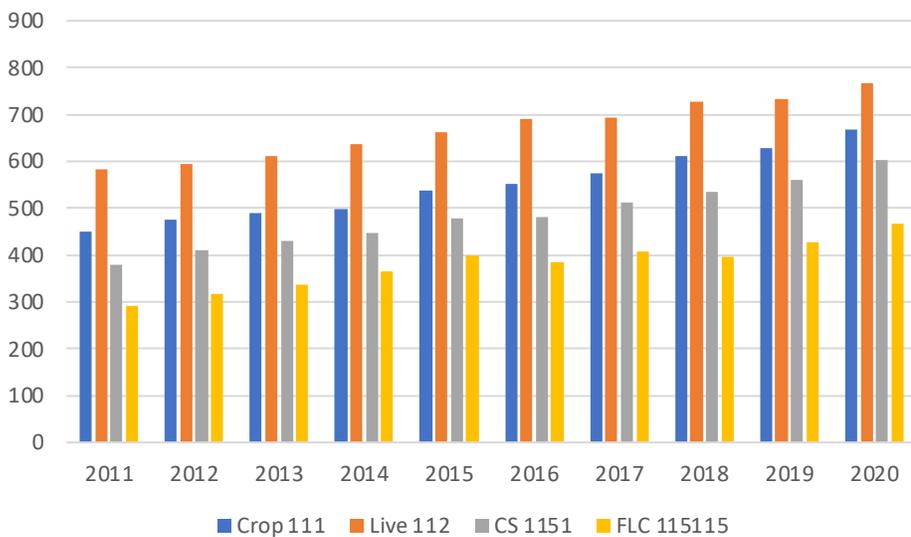
Wages for California Livestock Workers and Directly Hired Crop Workers are Highest (\$/Week)



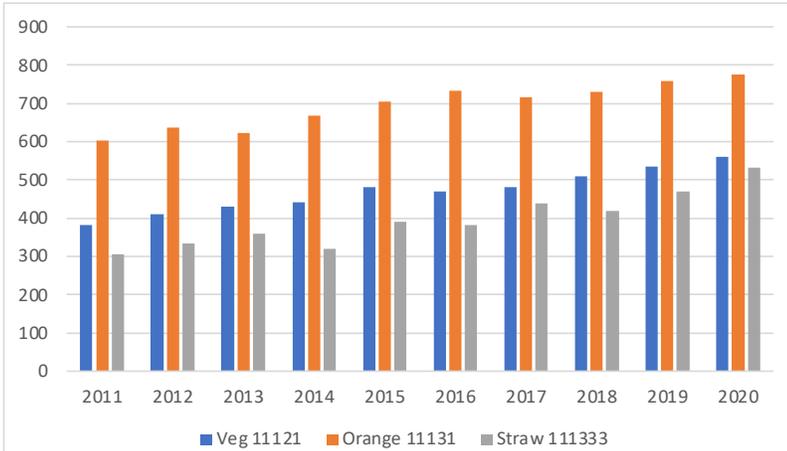
California Vegetable and Grape Wages are Higher than Apple and Strawberry Wages (\$/Week)



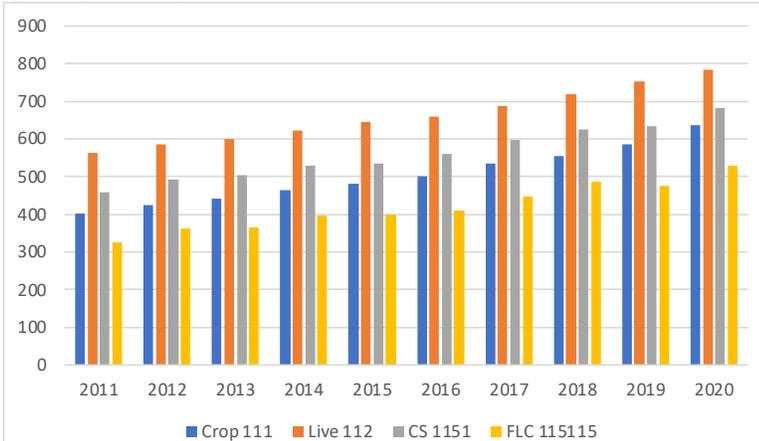
Wages for Florida Livestock Workers and Directly Hired Crop Workers are Highest (\$/Week)



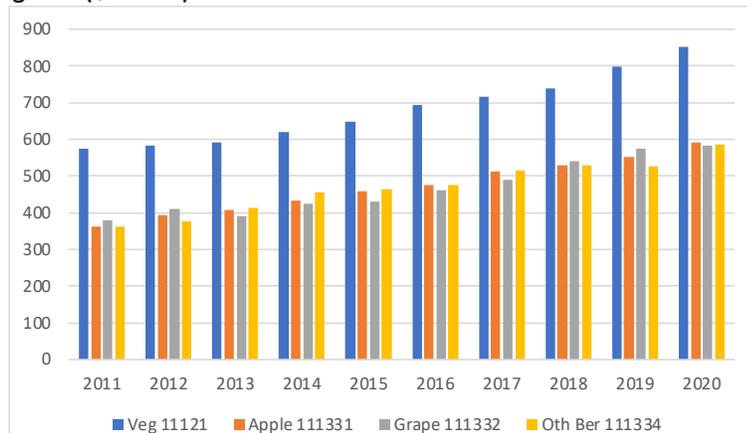
Florida Orange Workers Earned More than Vegetables and Strawberries (\$/Week)



Wages for Washington Livestock Workers and Crop Support Workers are Highest (\$/Week)



Wages for Washington Livestock Workers and Crop Support Workers are Highest (\$/Week)



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More at: <https://migration.ucdavis.edu/rmn/>

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OFLC. H-2A performance data. https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/oflc/pdfs/H-2A_Selected_Statistics_FY2022_Q2.pdf

USDA Farm Labor Survey. <https://usda.library.cornell.edu/concern/publications/x920fw89s>