

GROWERTALKS

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USDA Publishes Farm Labor Survey

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The Farm Labor Survey, conducted by the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), provides employment and wage estimates for workers directly hired by U.S. farms and ranches, excluding Alaska, for four quarterly reference weeks and annual averages, targeting farms with \$1,000 or more annual sales value. The report includes quarterly estimates of hired workers, average hours worked per worker and average hourly wage rates for field workers, livestock workers and all hired workers.

The latest survey was published November 22, 2023.

Why does this matter? The results of the FLS are used to set next year's regional Adverse Effect Wage Rates (AEWRs) for the H-2A program. While the new AEWRs will take effect only after they're published in the Federal Register, we now have a sneak peek into what they will be.

Across all states, the average AEWR will increase by 5.60%. AEWRs will rise in every region, with the biggest increases in the Pacific (Washington and Oregon) and Southeast (Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina) regions with 7.12% and 7.39%, respectively. The lowest AEWR, \$14.53, will be in the Delta region (Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi). The highest AEWR will be in California, at \$19.75.

Following are some more "mundane" results from the most recent survey:

- During the week of October 8-14, 2023, there were 776,000 workers directly hired by farm operators on the nation's farms and ranches, down 1% from the October 2022 reference week.
- During the week of July 9-15, 2023, there were 781,000 workers hired directly by farm operators, down 2% from the July 2022 reference week.
- Farm operators paid their hired workers an average gross wage of \$18.81 per hour, up 6% from the October 2022 reference week.
- Field workers received an average of \$18.24 per hour, up 7%, while livestock workers earned \$17.19 per hour, up 4%. The combined gross wage rate for field and livestock workers was \$17.95 per hour, up 6% from the 2022 reference week.
- Hired laborers worked an average of 41.7 hours during the October 2023 reference week and 41.2 hours during the July 2023 reference week.

■ The 2023 annual average combined gross wage for field and livestock workers (the wage statistic from which the AEWR is set) was \$17.55, up 6% from the 2022 annual average of \$16.62 per hour.

The full survey can be found [HERE](#). To see what your region's FLS-based AEWR will be next year, refer to Page 25, the column "Type of Worker—Field and Livestock Combined—2023" for your region. A map of the regions is found on page 26. Bear in mind that under new Labor Department regulations, higher AEWRs may be established for certain job classifications not presented in the USDA FLS.

—Frida Mendez, DCLRS, and Matt Mika, *AmericanHort*

Senate Restores Funding for Urban Agriculture

Led by Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Chairwoman of the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry Committee, the Senate has restored \$8.5 million in funding for the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production, which assists urban, small-scale and innovative producers with technical and financial assistance that supports community farms and gardens, and rooftop, indoor and vertical farms, and other innovative production. The idea is to increase greenspaces in communities, improve access to fresh, local foods and open new pathways to jobs in agriculture.

Initially, neither the Senate nor House agriculture appropriations bills included dedicated funding for the Office. But Sen. Stabenow filed an amendment to an agriculture appropriations package, which passed the Senate by a vote of 82 to 15. The amendment must now be conferenced with the House before being signed into law.

The funding was applauded by the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition and the International Fresh Produce Association.

"Urban and innovative agriculture offers tremendous opportunities for sustainable production and puts fresh produce closer to the consumers who needed it most to improve their health and reduce hunger, especially in underserved communities," said IFPA Vice President of U.S. Government Relations Rebeckah Adcock.

—Chris Beytes

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