GROWERTALKS

Features

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Heading Into the Unknown

Jennifer Zurko, Data Compiled by Industry Insights

Labor issues aren't a new problem for greenhouse growers and garden center retailers. You've been dealing with scrambling to find a reliable workforce for years.

But one thing we do know is that the H-2A guestworker visa program has saved your bacon.

H-2A is not a new program—nursery growers and other agriculture businesses like fruit, vegetable and dairy

have used it for years. But the labor shortage has trickled down to affect specialty crop growers, who've been forced to turn to the program to get workers. More and more greenhouse operations have applied for H-2A during the last five years and the data bears this out.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), they received almost 21,000 applications for H-2A visas in 2023, which was a significant increase over the 12,000 from the year before. Between 2017 and 2022, the number of workers certified through the program by DOL increased by 65%.

Although fruit and vegetable producers are still the primary participants of the H-2A program, we know that specialty crop growers were a significant part of the increase seen over the last decade. And now, almost every grower I talk to who uses H-2A said that they wouldn't be able to stay in business without it.

Because of this, one of the new questions in the Salary & Benefits Survey for this year was whether respondents use H-2A or H-2B to fill some of their workforce. About 39% said that they use H-2A or H-2B, mostly from the larger operations (above 100,000 sq. ft.). For those that use either program, the average number of workers they get is 96.

On the landscape side, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) announced back in the fall that it had reached the congressionally mandated cap for H-2B visas for temporary non-agricultural workers for the first half of fiscal year 2025. AmericanHort sent out a call to our industry to reach out to their legislative representatives to request an increase in the cap. (The annual H-2B cap is set at 66,000, with 33,000 visas allocated for each half of the fiscal year.)

As of press time, we don't know if the cap was increased, but since this issue is being sent to press right after the election, we can assume that Congress has had other things on its mind. And with a change in administration, we find ourselves in even more unknown territory.



In November, President-elect Donald Trump announced that Tom Homan, who was a national security advisor in the first Trump White House, would be the new "border czar." On "60 Minutes," Mr. Homan said that large-scale worksite raids could be a key part in the Trump Administration's immigration plan to detain and deport unauthorized workers.

We don't yet know how, when—or even if—these plans will be implemented. But it would be wise to plan ahead, make sure you have all of your staffing paperwork in order, and pay attention as much as possible on any new legislation related to immigration and seasonal workforce programs. Also, maintaining direct contact with your local representatives in Congress to let them know how specific plans affect your business can go a long way in trying to stave off any challenges or obstacles into getting the reliable workforce you need.

"Finding enough workers and the right workers remains a big challenge for our members and we are dedicated to helping our industry acquire the labor it needs to succeed," said Matt Mika, VP Advocacy & Government Affairs for AmericanHort. "While it's too early to know exactly how President-elect Trump's administration may change these programs, we'll continue to push for simpler rules for using H-2A and work to reduce the paperwork and costs tied to the program. With many new faces in Congress, now is an important time for growers to reach out to their representatives, share their stories, and explain how H-2A and H-2B make a difference for their businesses. Our goal is to support growers by advocating for policies that address these urgent labor issues, so they can focus on what they do best—growing plants."

If you're a member of AmericanHort, you can reach out to them with any questions or assistance you need regarding labor and legislative issues. If you're not a member, now may be a good time to think about becoming one.

Who responded to our survey?

Of the greenhouse grower respondents, 29% said they also have a nursery operation, 27% sell retail and 28% have a landscape division.

Region

East – 10% West – 24%

VVC3t - 2-7/0

Midwest – 41%

South - 19%

Production Size

Less than 100,000 sq. ft. – 29% 100,000 to 499,999 sq. ft. – 32% 500,000 sq. ft. or more – 39%

Customer Base

IGCs - 48%

Big box stores - 35%

Supermarkets/Small hardware stores - 36%

Florists - 17%

Landscapers - 47%

Other wholesalers - 48%

Direct to consumer (including online and catalog sales) - 42%

Fundraisers - 23%

Brokers - 24%

Municipalities – 8%

Staffing How many people do you employ during peak season? Average full and part time is 275 with an average full time of 230.

	Add Staff	Reduce Staff	Keep Staff the Same	I Don't Know
Staff Changes Made During 2024	35%	12%	53%	0%
Staff Plans for 2025	30%	8%	54%	8%
Previous Years 2023	36%	15%	48%	1%
2022	24%	10%	58%	9%
2021	40%	2%	46%	11%
2020	39%	2%	51%	9%
2019	32%	4%	56%	8%
2018	29%	5%	60%	6%
2017	32%	6%	55%	8%
2016	30%	6%	58%	7%
2015	29%	7%	59%	5%
2014	27%	6%	59%	9%

Healthcare & Other Benefits

easonal	Part Time	Full Time	***************************************
19%	9%	80%	Health/Medical Insurance
16%	9%	69%	Dental Insurance
9%	6%	57%	Life Insurance
44%	47%	63%	Sick Leave
9%	6%	55%	Disability Insurance
19%	29%	76%	401(k)
3%	3%	6%	Pension
31%	38%	59%	Annual Bonus
19%	21%	96%	Paid Vacation
34%	29%	92%	Paid Holidays
75%	79%	69%	Employee Discount
19%	21%	16%	Other
1976	21%	10 %	
	EW	400	Benefits offered in 2014
	5%	49%	Health/Medical Insurance
	3%	23%	Dental Insurance
	3%	23%	Life Insurance
	4%	38%	Sick Leave
	3%	19%	Disability Insurance
	7%	32%	401(k)
	0%	7%	Pension
	21%	48%	Annual Bonus
	11%	70%	Paid Vacation
	16%	58%	Paid Holidays
			Employee Discount
	6%	12%	Other
			Which benefits do your employe
18%	15%	80%	Health/Medical Insurance
0%	7%	20%	Dental Insurance
0%	0%	6%	Life Insurance
45%	41%	33%	Sick Leave
0%	0%	6%	Disability Insurance
45%	26%	43%	401(k)
0%	0%	6%	Pension
64%	37%	35%	Annual Bonus
18%	30%	85%	Paid Vacation
27%	30%	43%	Paid Holidays
64%	56%	22%	Employee Discount
9%	7%	2%	Other
	employees?	ract and retain	Which benefits do you use to at
18%	18%	28%	Above market salaries
0%	4%	28%	Added medical benefits
14%	18%	40%	Added vacation days/PTO
54%	61%	58%	Flexible work schedule
0%	7%	12%	Telecommuting
14%	14%	12%	Incentive compensation
0%	0%	7%	Mentoring program
0%	11%	14%	Profit sharing
14%	7%	26%	Tuition reimbursement
4%			
0%			
0%			
4%			
0%			
7%	11%	9%	Carlo
11%	11%	9%	
4 0 7	7% 0% 0% 4% 0% 11%	9% 5% 0% 2% 5% 9%	Retention bonus Signing bonus Childcare services/reimbursement Stock options Fuel allowance Other We are doing nothing to attract or retain employees

Compensation

Hourly Employees (U.S. only, average per hour)

Temp/Seasonal General Labor = \$16.15

Part-Time General Labor = \$16.29

Full-Time General Labor = \$17.09

Job	Average Salary	Average Hourly
All Respondents		
Crew Leader	\$43,912	\$18.59
Department Manager	\$69,883	\$28.56
Field Supervisor	\$53,522	\$24.79
General Labor	\$36,443	\$17.09
General Manager	\$104,368	
Grower 2nd level (3-5 years)	\$48,807	\$22.66
Grower Junior level (0-2 years)	\$41,880	\$20.03
Grower Senior level (6+ years)	\$60,370	\$23.33
Head Grower	\$83,037	\$32.27
Merchandise Manager	\$68,208	••
Merchandiser	**	
Owner	\$100,867	••
Sales Manager	\$96,648	
Section Grower	\$58,730	\$23.68
Truck Driver	\$43,455	\$20.82
Midwest		
Crew Leader	\$43,319	\$18.29
Department Manager	\$66,253	\$25.86
Field Supervisor	\$57,202	\$27.59
General Labor	\$38,507	\$17.89
General Manager	\$86,749	**
Grower 2nd level (3-5 years)	\$44,232	\$21.82
Grower Junior level (0-2 years)	\$40,996	\$20.27
Grower Senior level (6+ years)	\$54,487	
Head Grower	\$75,789	
Merchandise Manager	\$72,850	
Merchandiser	**	
Owner	\$106,035	••
Sales Manager	\$87,160	
Section Grower	\$48,957	\$23.24
Truck Driver	\$43,900	\$21.38
East		
Crew Leader		
Department Manager		
Field Supervisor		
General Labor	\$37,471	\$17.30
General Manager		
Grower 2nd level (3-5 years)	**	**
Grower Junior level (0-2 years)		
Grower Senior level (6+ years)		
Head Grower		
Merchandise Manager		
Merchandiser		
Owner		
Sales Manager		
Section Grower		
Truck Driver	**	

Job	Average Salary	Average Hourly
South		
Crew Leader	\$41,686	\$18.46
Department Manager	\$70,047	••
Field Supervisor		
General Labor	\$32,408	\$15.61
General Manager		**
Grower 2nd level (3-5 years)		••
Grower Junior level (0-2 years)		
Grower Senior level (6+ years)		••
Head Grower	\$101,224	
Merchandise Manager		••
Merchandiser		
Owner	\$103,200	••
Sales Manager		
Section Grower	\$70,147	••
Truck Driver	\$29,470	\$18.06
West		
Crew Leader	\$45,623	\$18.99
Department Manager	\$75,493	\$32.04
Field Supervisor		
General Labor	\$36,568	\$17.33
General Manager	\$109,227	
Grower 2nd level (3-5 years)	**	••
Grower Junior level (0-2 years)	\$41,808	\$20.10
Grower Senior level (6+ years)	\$69,830	**
Head Grower	\$87,539	
Merchandise Manager	**	••
Merchandiser		
Owner	\$86,799	••
Sales Manager	\$111,012	
Section Grower	**	
Truck Driver	\$52,265	\$21.47



Job	Average Salary	Average Hourly
Between 100,000 to 500	,000 sq. ft.	
Crew Leader	\$39,100	
Department Manager	\$55,752	**
Field Supervisor	••	••
General Labor	**	\$15.72
General Manager	\$84,128	**
Grower 2nd level (3-5 years)	**	**
Grower Junior level (0-2 years)		
Grower Senior level (6+ years)	**	**
Head Grower	\$72,455	
Merchandise Manager	**	**
Merchandiser		**
Owner	**	**
Sales Manager	••	••
Section Grower	**	**
Truck Driver	**	**

Job	Average Salary	Average Hourly
Over 500,000 sq. ft.		
Crew Leader	\$43,400	\$17.25
Department Manager	\$82,231	\$38.18
Field Supervisor	\$53,769	\$24.99
General Labor	\$34,637	\$16.46
General Manager	\$114,215	••
Grower 2nd level (3-5 years)	\$55,023	**
Grower Junior level (0-2 years)	\$44,493	
Grower Senior level (6+ years)	\$67,511	**
Head Grower	\$95,509	
Merchandise Manager	\$67,850	**
Merchandiser		**
Owner	\$156,351	**
Sales Manager	\$103,230	
Section Grower	\$63,063	\$24.95
Truck Driver	\$49,730	\$23.37 ①