

# Farm Labor

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## SPRING WORK PREPARATIONS MAKE EARLY ADVANCE WORKERS 1 PERCENT UNDER YEAR AGO

A warm last half of February brought likelihood of an early spring rush of farm work. Farmers generally are well equipped and ready to work with an early season --a contrast with last year's slow start on many farms. The February work force active during the survey week was only 1 percent smaller than a year earlier. The estimated total of 5.3 million persons comprised 4.3 million family workers and 1.0 million hired workers.

The number of farm family workers was about 2 percent smaller than a year earlier. Slight decreases were shown in each geographic region with the exception of the Mountain States where the total edged above. Changes in farm organization have continued to reduce the number of farm family units while operation efficiency increases. Heavy rains over much of the South during the survey week held down the work level on many farms.

Hired workers during the February survey week, at the one million mark, were about 3 percent more numerous than during the February survey week of 1960 when weather was unfavorable. Increases were shown in East North Central, West North Central, South Atlantic, Mountain, and Pacific States but most changes were relatively moderate to small. Florida missed the heavy rains which soaked other parts of the Southeast. Vegetable harvests were speeded by unseasonably warm weather and general farm activity in the State also stepped ahead to swell the hired work force.

### Farmers Getting Ready for an Early Spring

The open and predominantly dry weather which much of February brought to extensive areas of the Central and Western States helped ease livestock work and encouraged preparations for early field work. Setbacks could easily change an optimistic early spring work picture as the season progresses. Farmer reporters see some early season factors which lead to caution. More precipitation would be welcome in important sections of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota and the Northern Plains States to get soil ready for the heavy moisture demands of the growing season. Poor prospects for irrigation water are reported in Utah, Nevada, and other Mountain State areas. The fruit areas of Washington and Oregon have been pushed toward unseasonably early bloom while workers were completing pruning and other orchard operations. Peaches in Southeastern States also are vulnerable to late spring frosts after being

pushed into early bloom. Tobacco bed preparation can be expected to make rapid progress in most important growing areas after recent effects of heavy rains have passed. One of the first harvests for the Northeast --the maple sirup crop-- made a good start in late February with some promising flows reported, making considerable work in sections of the New England States, and in New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. In general, the farm labor supply seems adequate for most needs of 1961 but strong demand exists for capable workers.

### What Kind of Year?

#### The Question on Every Farm

Reports at the end of February give many details by States which reflect present conditions and future farm work prospects. In the far Northwest, central Washington has had near ideal precipitation and seedbed preparation is well along. Transplanting of new mint in the Yakima Valley was in progress. Fruit trees are budding about two weeks early. In Oregon, a mild extra-wet February moved the State from a mild open winter into early spring. Fruit buds are out too early for safety in the Hood River Valley. Spring pruning was pushed in Northwest fruit areas.

In California, deciduous tree fruits in many areas made huge blocks of bloom of entire orchards. Some bloom has been three weeks ahead of normal. Preparations for planting the State's large cotton crop were at a peak and about on schedule, with planting and other field crop work increasing. Harvest was starting for San Joaquin delta asparagus and southern California strawberries. Desert lettuce and carrots continue as major harvests. First cutting of alfalfa for hay was starting in the Imperial Valley.

Arizona irrigated areas featured preparations for and the start of cotton planting, continuing harvest of lettuce and other vegetables, and harvest of grapefruit and valencias. New Mexico field preparations progressed. Texas got heavy snow on parts of the High Plains and much of the State was wet. Planting of corn and sorghum, however, was active in the Lower Valley. Lower Valley cotton planting started February 1 in cool weather and at the month's end was nearly one-third completed. Spring lambing was active on the Edwards Plateau and goat shearing was under way.

In Oklahoma, seedbed preparation was active and oats and barley were being seeded. Kansas farmers had planted about 8 percent of their oats by the end of the month --well ahead of last year's slow pace but still a bit behind normal. Nebraska work was well advanced under mild weather. Missouri oats seeding was slowed by rains after a start in early February.

Field work in most East Central and South Atlantic areas was delayed by rain during the February survey week. Floods in Mississippi and Alabama caused additional work. Livestock generally escaped to higher ground with few losses, but required extra feed and care. Potatoes in the Baldwin County area rotted in the ground even though the fields were not flooded; many fields are being replanted. Some Kentucky tobacco plant beds have been seeded but rains slowed this work. Farm labor supply was more than adequate in most South Carolina areas. Peach pruning and spraying has been active. Peaches in Georgia were nearly ready to bloom after a satisfactory dormancy but too early for safety. Unseasonably warm weather in Florida during late February stimulated crop growth throughout the State and vegetable harvests were heavy, featuring tomatoes, cabbage, celery, peppers, and snap beans. Harvest of mid-season oranges and grapefruit continued strong during the month. Shade grown tobacco field cultivation was active and transplanting of plants is expected around mid-March.

In the Middle Atlantic States and northward cold weather in early February turned to warm and wet weather at the month's end with encouragement of some outdoor work such as fruit tree pruning. New Jersey blueberry growers are concerned over bud freeze damage which might reduce their harvests. Pennsylvania work is starting early; maple flows have started there, in New York, and in the important New England areas. Tapping and other work in the "sugar bush" gained in volume.

Westward into the Corn Belt mild weather had made livestock living easy but soil moisture was still scarce at the end of February. In some Ohio and southern Illinois sections the discouraging job of water hauling was necessary. In southernmost parts of the North Central area there has been rapid progress in spreading fertilizer, seeding clover on wheat fields, with a beginning in oats sowing and some spring plowing. Further north although little field work was done, the frost was coming out of the ground early. Livestock thrived during February and most newborn calves and lambs got a fine start.

Farm employment and indexes, February 1961, with comparisons, United States

	: Annual : average : 1960	: Annual : average : 1959	: Annual : average : 1955-59 1/2	: February : average : 1955-59 1/2	: February : 21-27, : 1960	: February : 19-25, : 1961
FARM EMPLOYMENT (Thousands)						
Total .....	7,118	7,384	7,734	5,951	5,305	5,269
Family labor ..	5,249	5,459	5,791	4,888	4,321	4,252
Hired labor ...	1,869	1,925	1,943	1,063	984	1,017
INDEXES <u>2/</u> (1910-14=100)						
Total .....	52	54	57	58	52	51
Family labor ..	52	54	57	58	51	50
Hired labor ...	55	57	57	58	54	55

1/ Employment during the last full calendar week ending at least one day before the end of the month.

2/ Monthly indexes are adjusted for seasonal variation.

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Farm Wage Rates and Indexes, January 1, 1961, United States

	: Annual : average : 1960	: January : average : 1955-59	: January : 1960	: January 1, : 1961
FARM WAGE RATES				
Composite rate per hour <u>1/</u> .....	\$ 0.818	\$ 0.784	\$ 0.896	\$ 0.909
Per month with house .....	\$192.00	\$166.00	\$194.00	\$197.00
Per month with board and room ...	149.00	133.00	152.00	155.00
Per week with board and room ....	35.50	31.25	34.50	34.75
Per week without board or room ..	45.75	40.25	46.25	46.75
Per day with house .....	5.30	4.70	5.40	5.40
Per day with board and room .....	6.50	5.60	6.30	6.40
Per day without board or room ...	6.60	5.80	6.60	6.60
Per hour with house .....	.88	.71	.81	.83
Per hour without board or room ..	.97	.95	1.05	1.08
INDEXES (1910-14=100)				
Farm wage rates .....	629	555	632	635
(Adjusted for seasonal variation)				
Prices received by farmers <u>2/</u> ...	238	233	228	242

1/ Weighted average of all rates on a per hour basis.

2/ Index for 15th of previous month.

Workers on Farms, February 1961

(Thousands of persons)

Region and State	February average			February 1960			February 1961		
	1955-59 1/			Week of 21-27			Week of 19-25		
	Total	Family:	Hired	Total	Family:	Hired	Total	Family:	Hired
New England .....	138	97	41	119	82	37	112	78	34
New York .....	150	111	39	133	97	36	134	97	37
New Jersey .....	40	29	11	34	26	8	35	26	9
Pennsylvania .....	193	164	29	168	145	23	162	141	21
Middle Atlantic .....	383	304	79	335	268	67	331	264	67
Ohio .....	238	219	19	219	204	15	215	197	18
Indiana .....	207	194	13	185	172	13	181	169	12
Illinois .....	213	178	35	187	158	29	188	158	30
Michigan .....	204	183	21	194	172	22	189	169	20
Wisconsin .....	278	256	22	256	236	20	253	232	21
East North Central..	1,140	1,030	110	1,041	942	99	1,026	925	101
Minnesota .....	231	213	18	208	190	18	206	188	18
Iowa .....	239	222	17	232	217	15	229	214	15
Missouri .....	233	214	19	218	203	15	217	202	15
North Dakota .....	71	63	8	62	55	7	60	53	7
South Dakota .....	80	73	7	71	66	5	71	65	6
Nebraska .....	130	121	9	126	117	9	128	117	11
Kansas .....	138	128	10	123	114	9	122	112	10
West North Central..	1,122	1,034	88	1,040	962	78	1,033	951	82
Delaware-Maryland.	52	37	15	47	34	13	48	36	12
Virginia .....	173	143	30	151	127	24	151	126	25
West Virginia .....	61	52	9	52	45	7	54	45	9
North Carolina .....	291	255	36	241	211	30	245	212	33
South Carolina .....	140	105	35	120	84	36	119	85	34
Georgia .....	157	120	37	136	101	35	129	96	33
Florida .....	128	53	75	107	45	62	130	45	85
South Atlantic .....	1,002	765	237	854	647	207	876	645	231
Kentucky .....	197	178	19	178	160	18	179	160	19
Tennessee .....	181	156	25	151	130	21	157	134	23
Alabama .....	109	93	16	91	75	16	82	69	13
Mississippi .....	176	145	31	131	108	23	132	106	26
East South Central..	663	572	91	551	473	78	550	469	81
Arkansas .....	169	133	36	137	102	35	137	98	39
Louisiana .....	134	96	38	112	76	36	98	70	28
Oklahoma .....	174	160	14	138	130	8	148	136	12
Texas .....	321	251	70	288	212	76	270	196	74
West South Central..	798	640	158	675	520	155	653	500	153
Montana .....	42	37	5	37	32	5	37	33	4
Idaho .....	43	37	6	43	38	5	45	38	7
Colorado .....	49	44	5	45	41	4	45	40	5
N.Mex.-Ariz. ....	69	30	39	67	27	40	69	27	42
Wyo.-Utah-Nev. ...	43	35	8	39	31	8	40	32	8
Mountain .....	246	183	63	231	169	62	236	170	66
Washington .....	83	71	12	84	66	18	84	65	19
Oregon .....	71	59	12	69	58	11	67	56	11
California .....	305	133	172	306	134	172	301	129	172
Pacific .....	459	263	196	459	258	201	452	250	202
UNITED STATES .....	5,951	4,888	1,063	5,305	4,321	984	5,269	4,252	1,017

1/ Persons employed during the last full calendar week ending at least one day before the end of the month.

Workers on farms: Comparative estimates, annual average 1960,  
December 1960 and January 1961

(Thousands of persons)

Region and State	Annual average 1960			December 18-24, 1960			January 1961 Week of 22-28		
	Total	Family	Hired	Total	Family	Hired	Total	Family	Hired
New England .....	150	91	59	106	74	32	102	77	25
New York .....	163	107	56	132	95	37	126	95	31
New Jersey .....	47	28	19	29	20	9	30	22	8
Pennsylvania .....	194	159	35	148	126	22	144	124	20
Middle Atlantic .....	404	294	110	309	241	68	300	241	59
Ohio .....	250	214	36	199	185	14	179	166	13
Indiana .....	219	192	27	179	166	13	163	155	8
Illinois .....	249	201	48	203	176	27	181	151	30
Michigan .....	220	178	42	180	156	24	166	142	24
Wisconsin .....	282	253	29	245	228	17	234	219	15
West North Central..	1,220	1,038	182	1,006	911	95	923	833	90
Minnesota .....	266	228	38	191	177	14	191	180	11
Iowa .....	289	252	37	219	206	13	213	198	15
Missouri .....	276	237	39	226	208	18	210	195	15
North Dakota .....	92	71	21	60	52	8	56	49	7
South Dakota .....	92	81	11	72	66	6	66	62	4
Nebraska .....	160	135	25	123	112	11	122	113	9
Kansas .....	159	134	25	116	107	9	115	107	8
West North Central..	1,334	1,138	196	1,007	928	79	973	904	69
Delaware-Maryland..	70	45	25	49	36	13	46	35	11
Virginia .....	203	149	54	143	124	19	138	115	23
West Virginia .....	73	60	13	60	52	8	50	43	7
North Carolina .....	416	317	99	250	223	27	206	184	22
South Carolina .....	195	133	62	131	109	22	111	86	25
Georgia .....	185	135	50	116	93	23	106	87	19
Florida .....	98	46	52	87	36	51	103	40	63
South Atlantic .....	1,240	885	355	836	673	163	760	590	170
Kentucky .....	235	188	47	185	172	13	161	149	12
Tennessee .....	246	195	51	184	165	19	159	141	18
Alabama .....	149	116	33	106	93	13	79	66	13
Mississippi .....	252	195	57	159	138	21	127	109	18
East South Central..	882	694	188	634	568	66	526	465	61
Arkansas .....	212	126	86	123	100	23	114	92	22
Louisiana .....	153	95	58	86	71	15	95	75	20
Oklahoma .....	165	131	34	117	109	8	129	121	8
Texas .....	442	261	181	284	210	74	278	206	72
East South Central..	972	613	359	610	490	120	616	494	122
Montana .....	49	37	12	34	29	5	33	30	3
Idaho .....	67	47	20	41	35	6	39	35	4
Colorado .....	69	51	18	42	37	5	39	34	5
N.Mex. -Ariz. ....	90	32	58	97	30	67	71	25	46
Wyo.-Utah-Nev. ....	59	41	18	39	32	7	37	30	7
Mountain .....	334	208	126	253	163	90	219	154	65
Washington .....	113	76	37	64	54	10	74	62	12
Oregon .....	92	66	26	61	54	7	61	54	7
California .....	377	146	231	320	129	191	311	132	179
Pacific .....	582	288	294	445	237	208	446	248	198
UNITED STATES .....	7,118	5,249	1,869	5,206	4,285	921	4,865	4,006	859

## FARM LABOR OBSERVATIONS A HALF CENTURY AGO

Many of the data and conclusions reported in earlier years concerning the changing conditions in American agriculture gain interest in relation to the increased tempo of change in recent years. The following excerpts are from Bulletin #94 of USDA's Bureau of Statistics by George K. Holmes, titled Supply of Farm Labor, published in 1912.

"Farm labor in this country has presented the problem of a diminishing supply relative to population since the days of original settlement. It is the old familiar feature of the industrial nations of the world. Until recent years, the problem was almost entirely confined to the quantity of the supply, but, during the last decade or two, it has assumed a new phase in which not only the amount of supply has almost critically declined, but the quality has also absolutely declined, or has failed to keep pace with the need for labor, more skill, and more intelligence."

After an able presentation of statistics on farm workers the writer comments on the "Glamour of the City" for farm labor.

"In spite of all that the farmer has done or has been able to do, there has been a drift of labor from farm to city and industry, and the potential supply of farm labor has been diverted from the farm. The movement of farm labor to town and city, and to industry and transportation is to be accounted for quite as much by the student of psychology as by the student of economics. To the farm laborer who has been in the city little if at all, there is a glamour in city life which has a powerful influence upon his volition. The case is similar to that of the boy who runs away from home to hunt Indians. When this is joined to the greater nominal rate of wages that can be earned in the city, the combination of a little reasoning with a good deal of imagination is likely to rob the farmer of his hired man."

Hand and Machine Labor Contrasted

"Although the agricultural element of the population has declined, the productivity of this element has increased per individual worker by means of better implements and machines and their more general use."

"From 1855 to 1894, the time of human labor required to produce 1 bushel of corn on an average declined from 4 hours and 34 minutes to 41 minutes. This was because inventors had given the farmers of 1894 the gang plow, the disc harrow, the corn planter drawn by horses and the four-section harrow for pulverizing the topsoil; because they had given the farmer the self-binder drawn by horses to cut the stalks and bind them, a machine for removing the husks from the ears and in the same operation for cutting the husks, stalks and blades for feeding, the power being supplied by a steam engine; because they had given the farmer a marvelous corn sheller, operated by steam and shelling 1 bushel of corn per minute instead of the old way of corn shelling in which the labor of one man was required for 100 minutes to do the same work."

"In the matter of wheat production, 1894 being compared with 1830, the required human labor declined from 3 hours and 3 minutes to 10 minutes. The heavy, clumsy plow of 1830 had given way to the disk plow that both plowed and pulverized the soil at the same time; hand sowing had been displaced by the mechanical seeder drawn by horses; the cradling and thrashing with flails and hand winnowing had given way to reaping, thrashing, and sacking with the combined reaper drawn by horses."

"Herein lies the strength of the horse and mule as economic animals. The horse has been assailed by the bicycle, the electric street and suburban car, and by the automobile, but all combined have not prevented horses from increasing in numbers and in value. As sources of farm power and as substitutes for human labor in combination with implements and machines, the economic place of the horse and mule on the farm is more strongly established than ever before."

These excerpts from the 1912 view make clear the speed with which advancing technology has changed farming over a half century leaving animal power an insignificant place in farm operations. Today, new extensions of the versatility of machines continue to reduce labor on farms and to change farm-industry relationships.



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