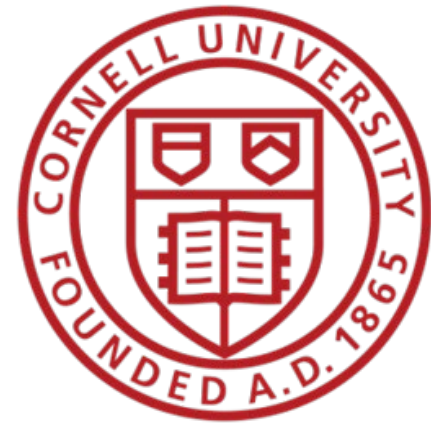


2025 Agricultural Labor Situation and Outlook



Richard Stup, Ph.D.

Director, Cornell Ag Workforce Development

rstup@cornell.edu

agworkforce.cals.cornell.edu

Key topics...

- New administration and border enforcement
- Factors driving workforce change
- Visa programs offer some options
- Policy reform needed
- Automation and AI will have a giant impact over time

Dairy Labor Economics in 1916



TABLE 34. — RELATION OF SIZE OF FARM TO EFFICIENCY IN THE
USE OF LABOR. 670 FARMS, JEFFERSON COUNTY, NEW YORK

ACRES	AVERAGE MAN EQUIVA- LENT	AVERAGE ACRES OF CROPS	AVERAGE NUMBER OF ANIMAL UNITS EXCEPT WORK HORSES	ACRES OF CROPS PER MAN	ANIMAL UNITS EXCEPT HORSES PER MAN
30 or less . . .	1.04	14	3.5	13	3
31-50 . . .	1.18	25	7.9	21	7
51-100 . . .	1.34	40	13.2	30	10
101-150 . . .	1.61	66	19.4	41	12
151-200 . . .	1.98	89	25.1	45	13
Over 200 . . .	2.35	134	34.2	57	15

Rising labor cost and efficiency

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	5-year % change
Labor Efficiency							
Cows per worker	49.3	50.9	52.2	53.6	53.9	53.9	9.30%
Milk sold per worker, pounds	1,275,895	1,340,937	1,375,538	1,450,212	1,463,867	1,480,651	16.00%
Labor Cost							
Hired labor cost per cwt.	\$ 2.95	\$ 2.95	\$ 3.07	\$ 3.06	\$ 3.24	\$ 3.39	
Labor cost per hired worker equivalent	\$ 43,192	\$ 45,179	\$ 48,005	\$ 50,555	\$ 53,730	\$ 56,591	31.00%

Source: [Karszes, J. \(2024, October\). Six year trend analysis 2023 New York State dairy farms selected financial and production factors. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management, Cornell University.](#)

New York Minimum Wage

With 2023 NY Budget,
increases occur Jan. 1

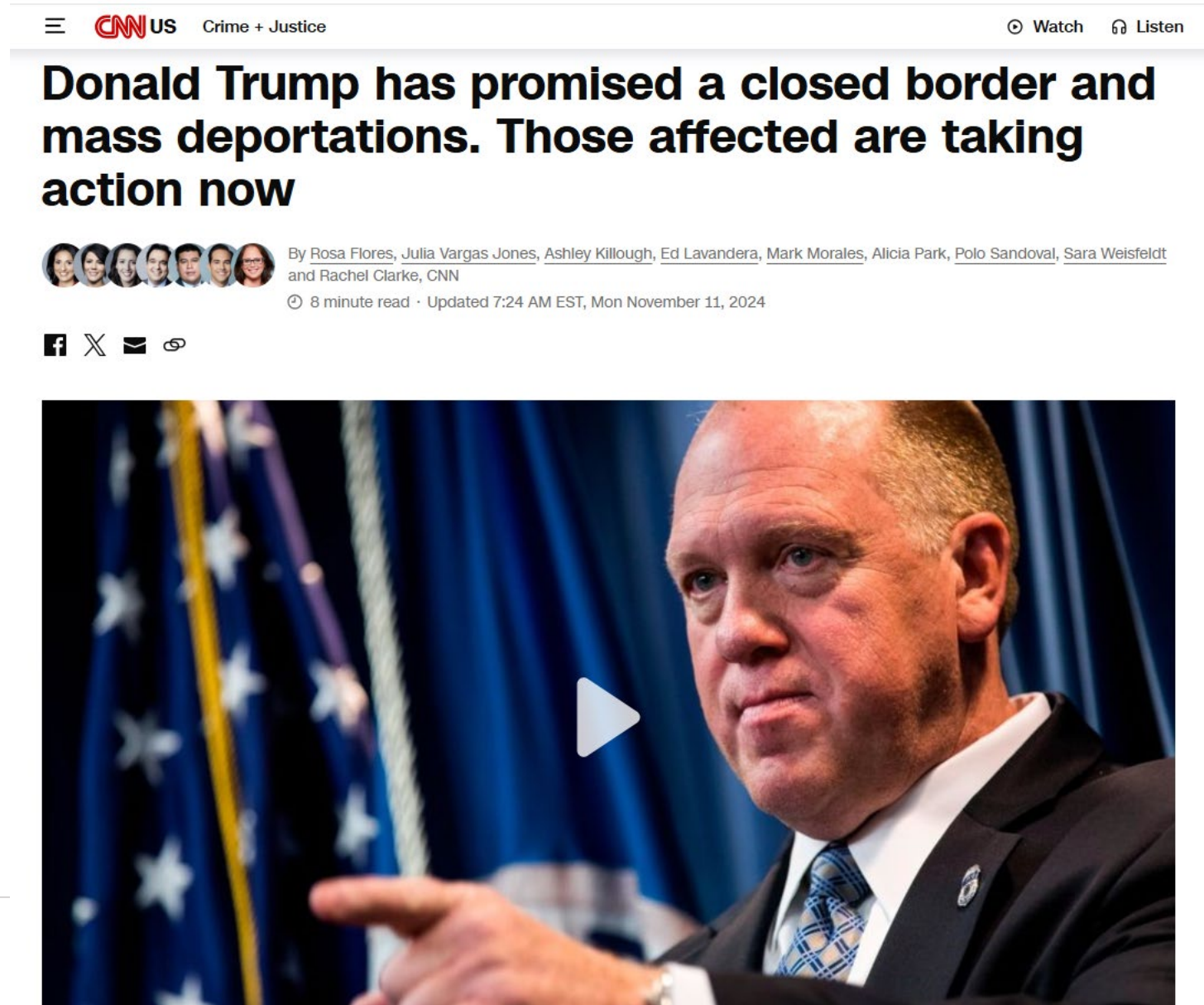
Location	12/31/ 16	12/31/ 17	12/31/ 18	12/31/ 19	12/31/ 20	12/31/ 21	12/31/ 22	01/01/ 24	01/01/ 25	01/01/ 26	01/01/ 27
NYC - Big Employers (11 or more)	\$11.00	\$13.00	\$15.00	\$15.00	\$15.00	\$15.00	\$15.00	\$16.00	\$16.50	\$17.00	\$17+
NYC - Small Employers (10 or less)	\$10.50	\$12.00	\$13.50	\$15.00	\$15.00	\$15.00	\$15.00				
Long Island & Westchester	\$10.00	\$11.00	\$12.00	\$13.00	\$14.00	\$15.00	\$15.00				
Remainder of New York State	\$9.70	\$10.40	\$11.10	\$11.80	\$12.50	\$13.20	\$14.20	\$15.00	\$15.50	\$16.00	\$16+

**Starting Jan 1, 2027, the annual increases will be published by the Commissioner of Labor on or before October 1. Annual increases will be tied to inflation, as measured by the consumer price index for the [Northeast Region Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers \(CPI-W\)](#).*

Tight borders, increased enforcement

Let's not overreact, but we also can't stick our heads in the sand.

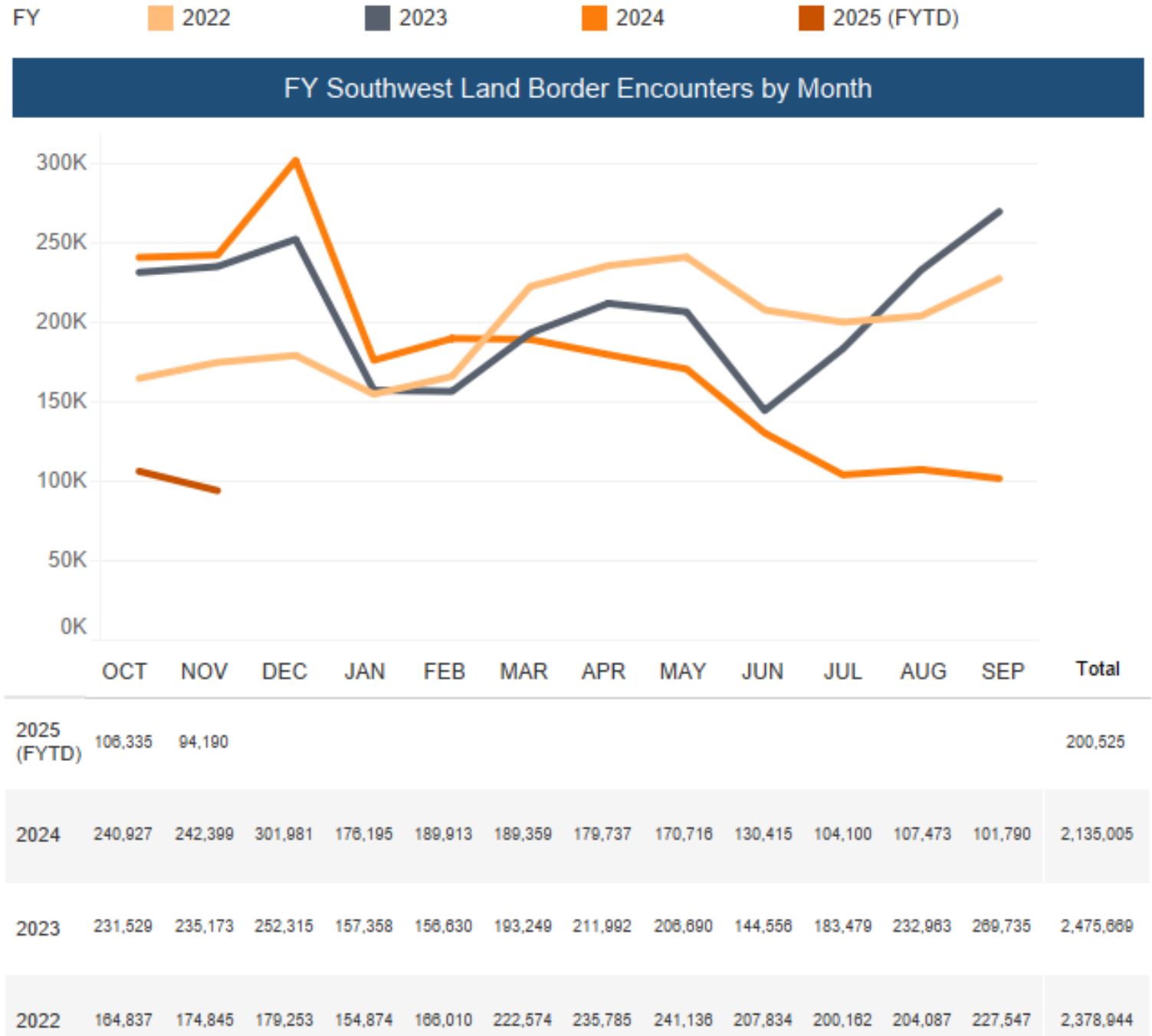
- Get I-9's in order
- Prepare for audits and raids
- [I-9 and Authorization webinar](#)



Total southwest border activity

- All encounters by U.S. Border Patrol and Field Operations
- Includes adults, families, and unaccompanied minors

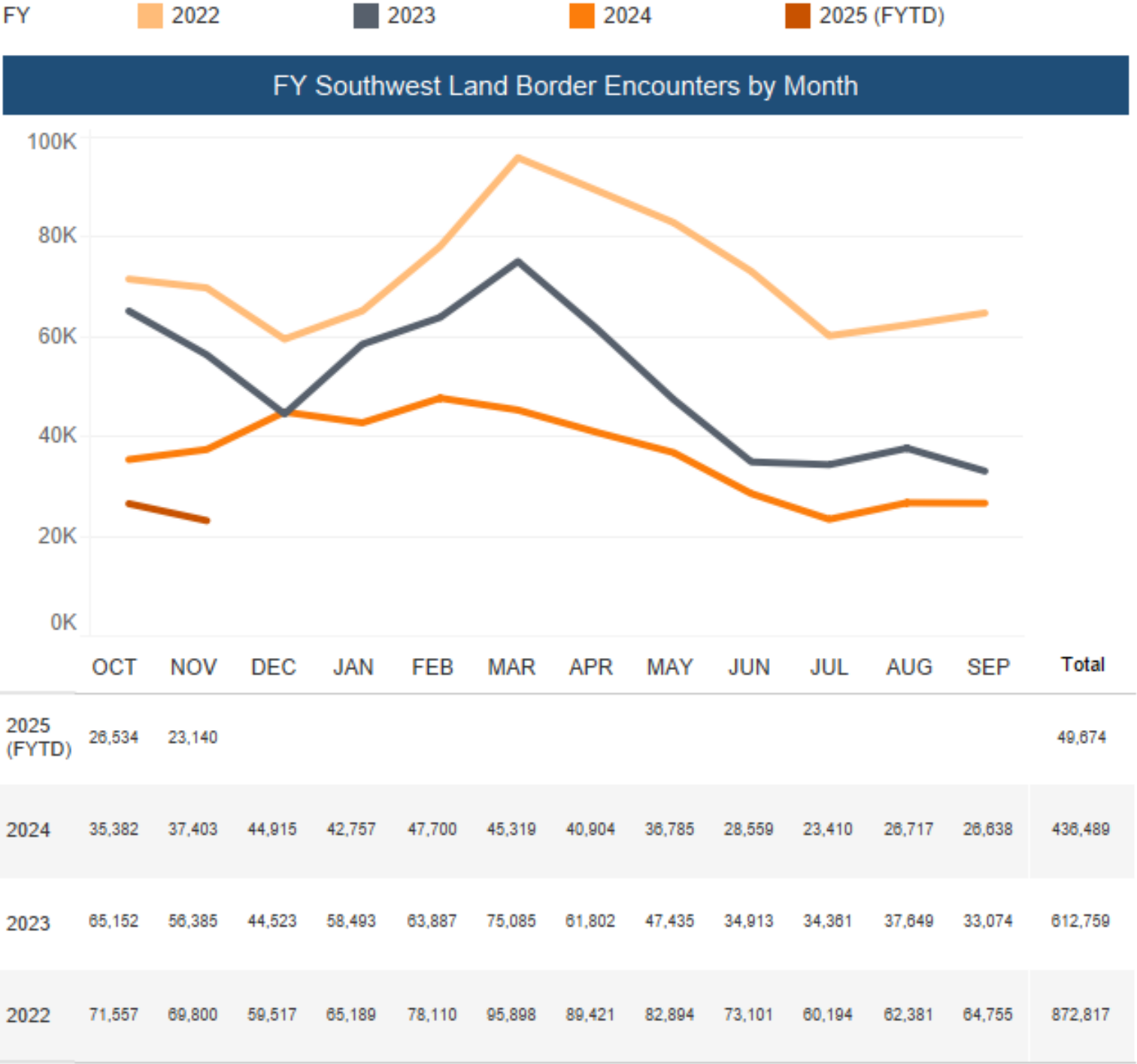
Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection



Economic southwest border activity

- Single adults
- Immigrants from Mexico and Guatemala

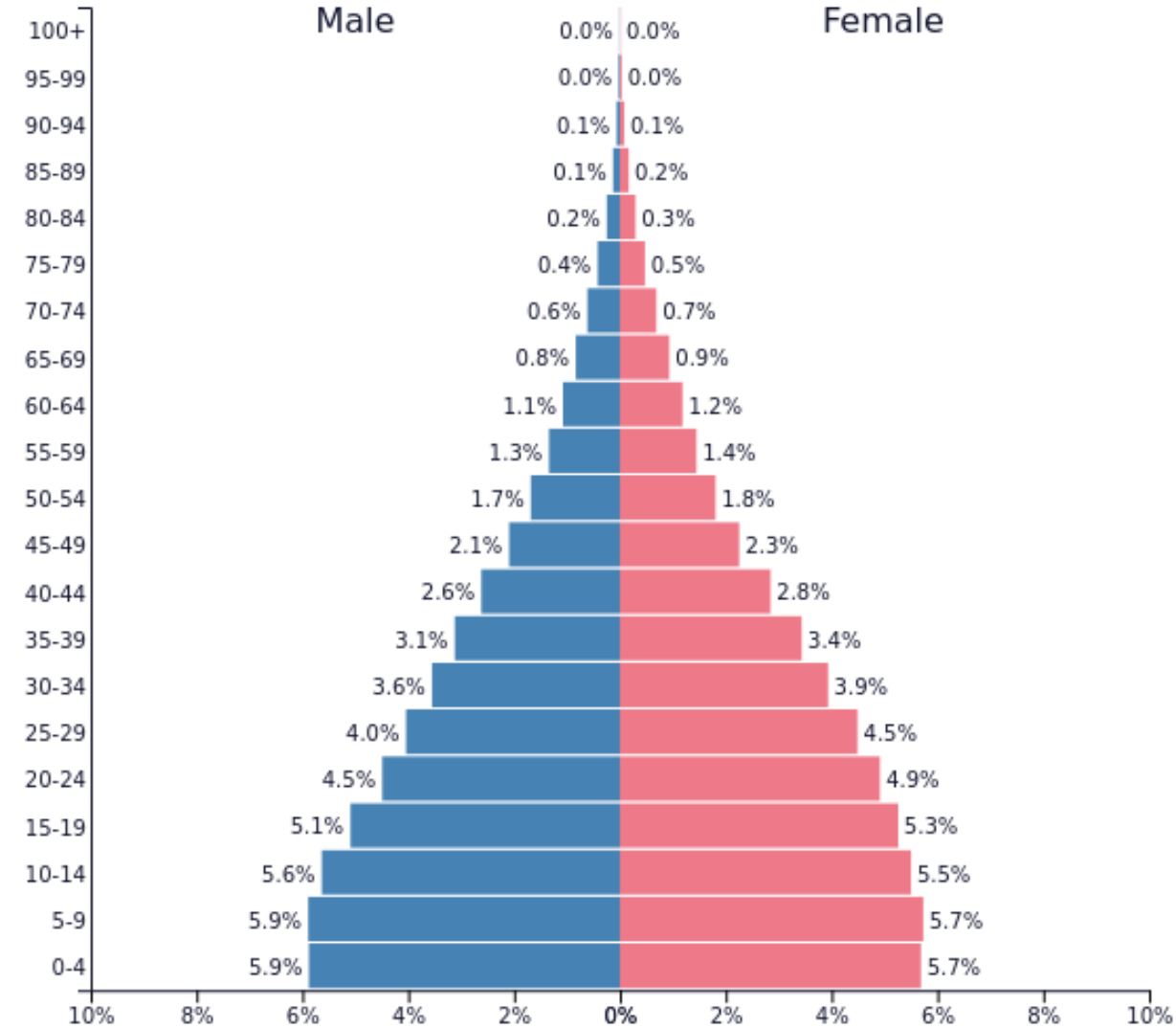
Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection



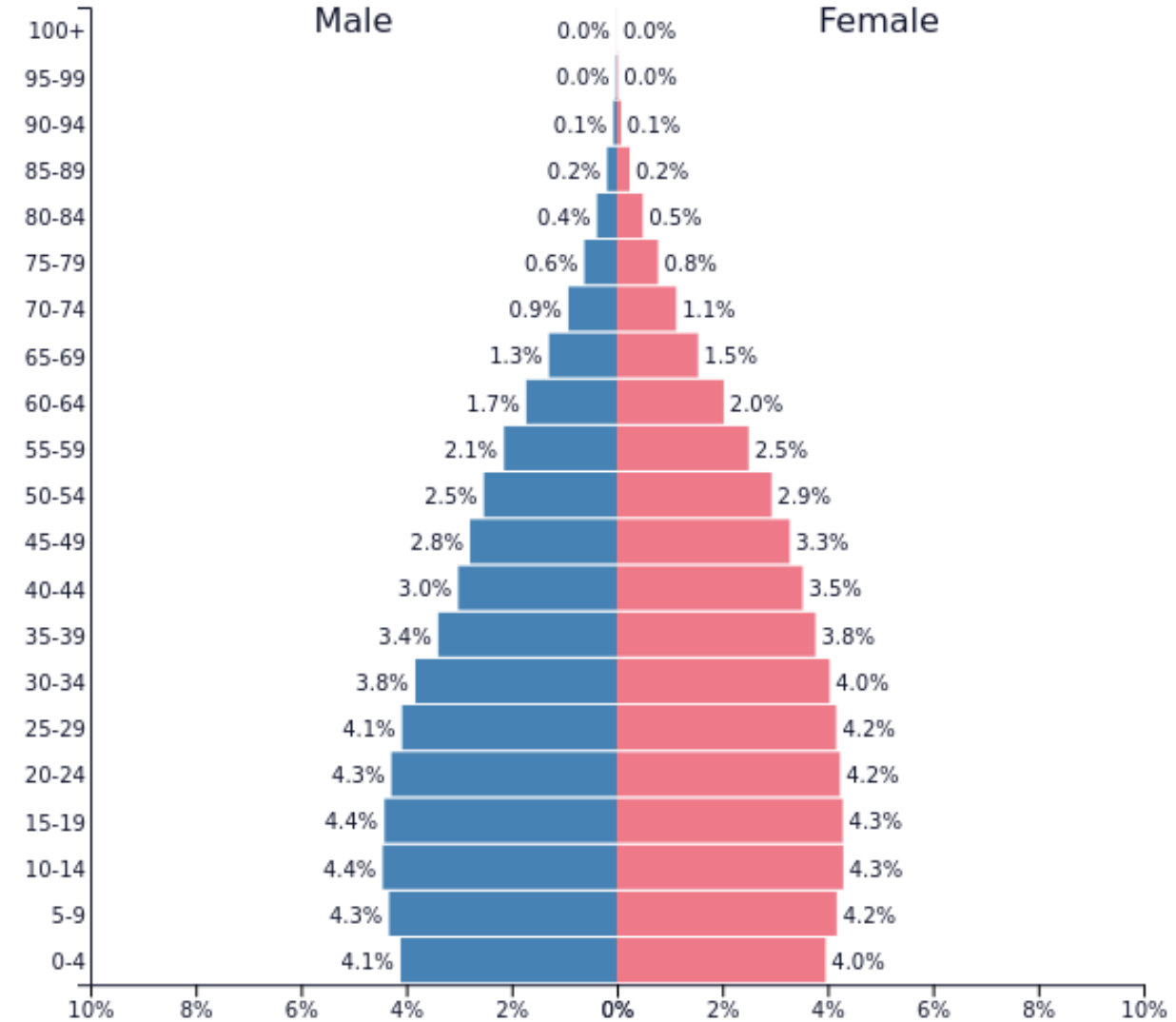
Fewer young Mexicans looking for work



Mexico population 2000 vs. 2022



Mexico - 2000
Population: 98,625,552



Mexico - 2022
Population: 128,613,117

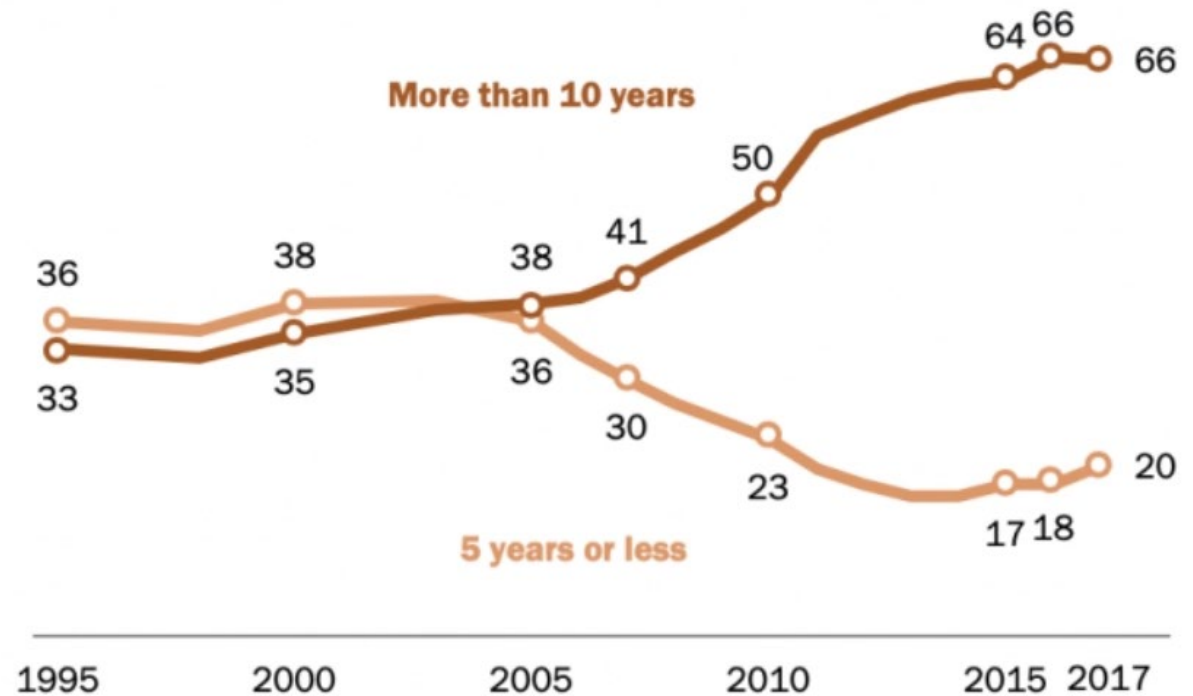
GDP per capita in Mexico, growth means more domestic jobs



Most Unauthorized Immigrants Are Now Long-Term U.S. Residents

Short-term residents decline and long-term residents rise as share of U.S. unauthorized immigrants

% of adult unauthorized immigrants, by duration of U.S. residence

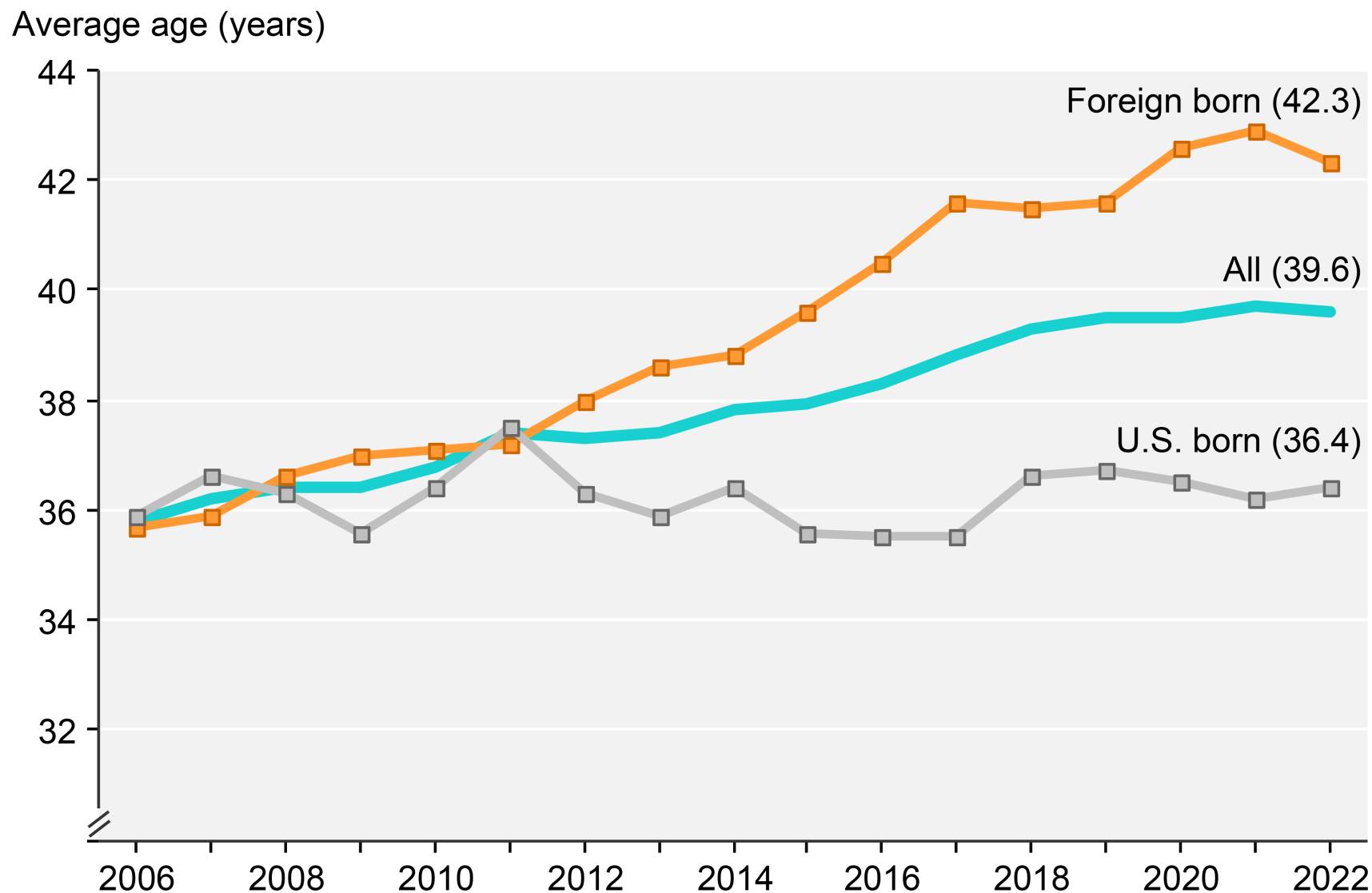


Source: Pew Research Center estimates based on augmented U.S. Census Bureau data.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

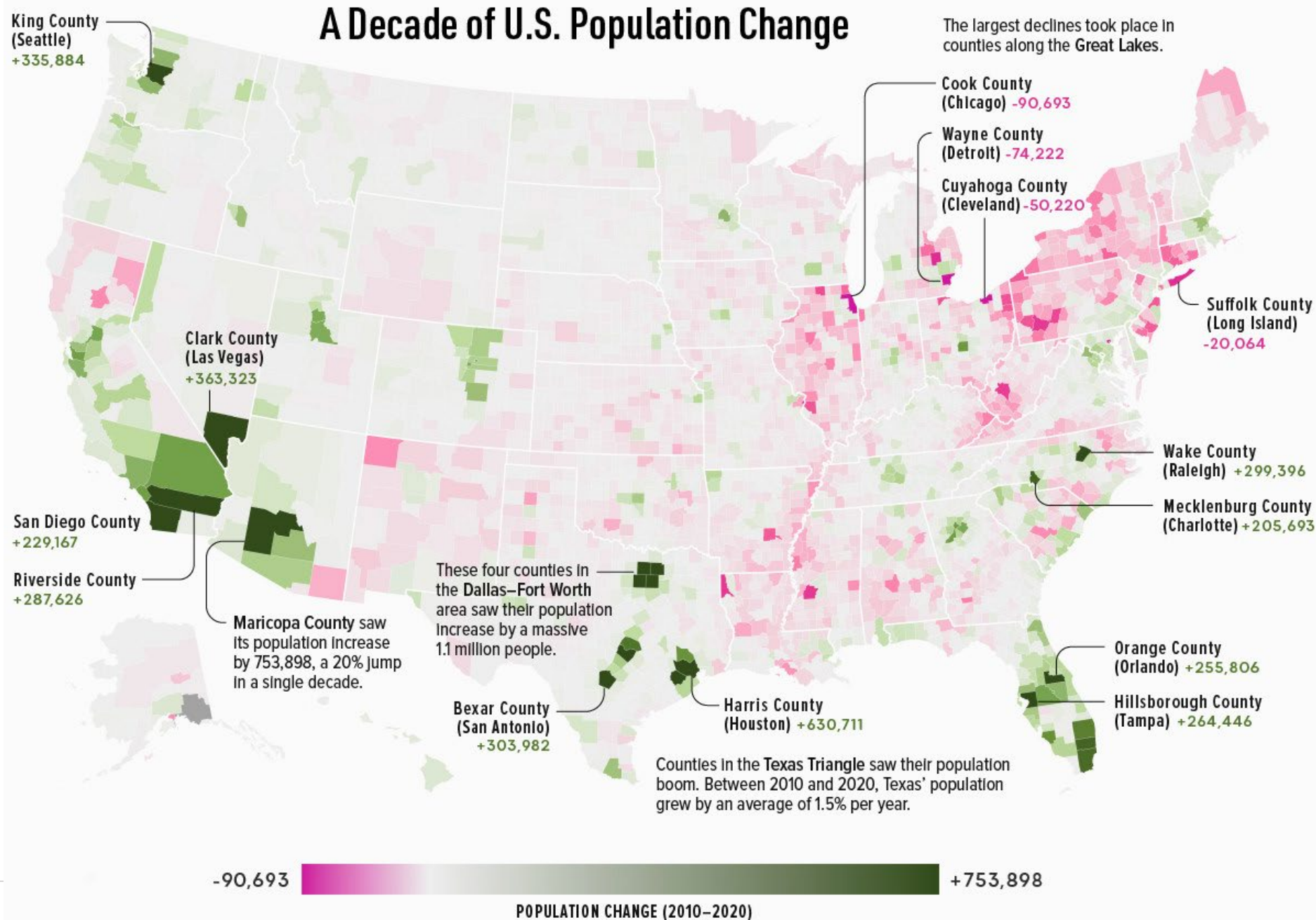
**Average age
of foreign-
born
employees
is increasing**

Average age of U.S. farm laborers/graders/sorters by place of birth, 2006–22



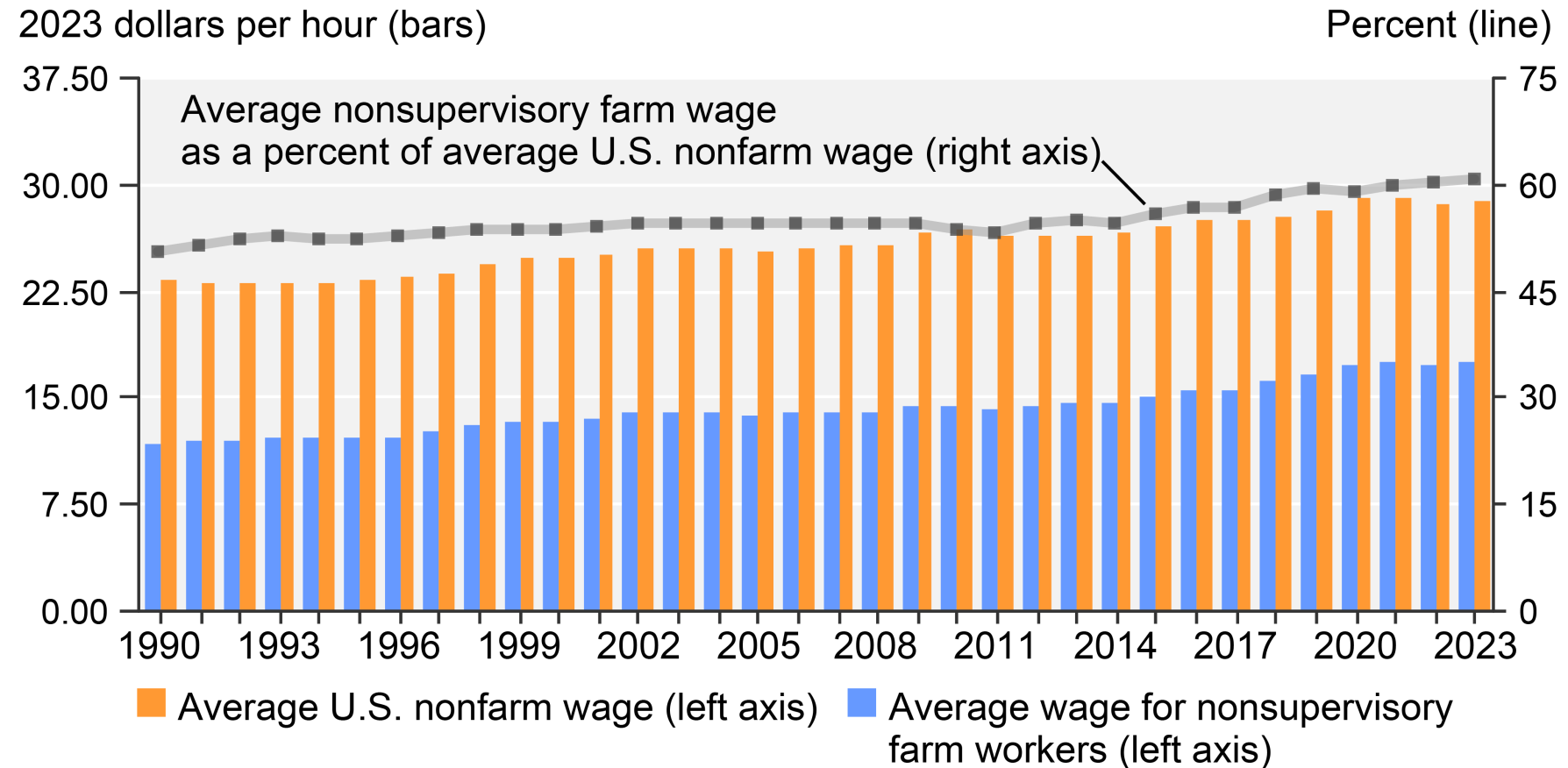
Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, annual American Community Survey.

Population decline in rural counties means fewer local employees to recruit



Farm wages continue to gain on nonfarm wages

Real wages for U.S. nonsupervisory farm and nonfarm workers, 1990–2023



Note: The nonfarm wage includes nonsupervisory employees in mining and logging, manufacturing, and construction, and nonsupervisory employees in the service-providing industries. These groups account for about 80 percent of total employment on private nonfarm payrolls. Wages are adjusted for inflation using U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, consumer price index (CPI-U).

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, Farm Labor Survey and nonfarm wage data from U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Employment Statistics survey.

Today's Solutions



Cornell Cooperative Extension

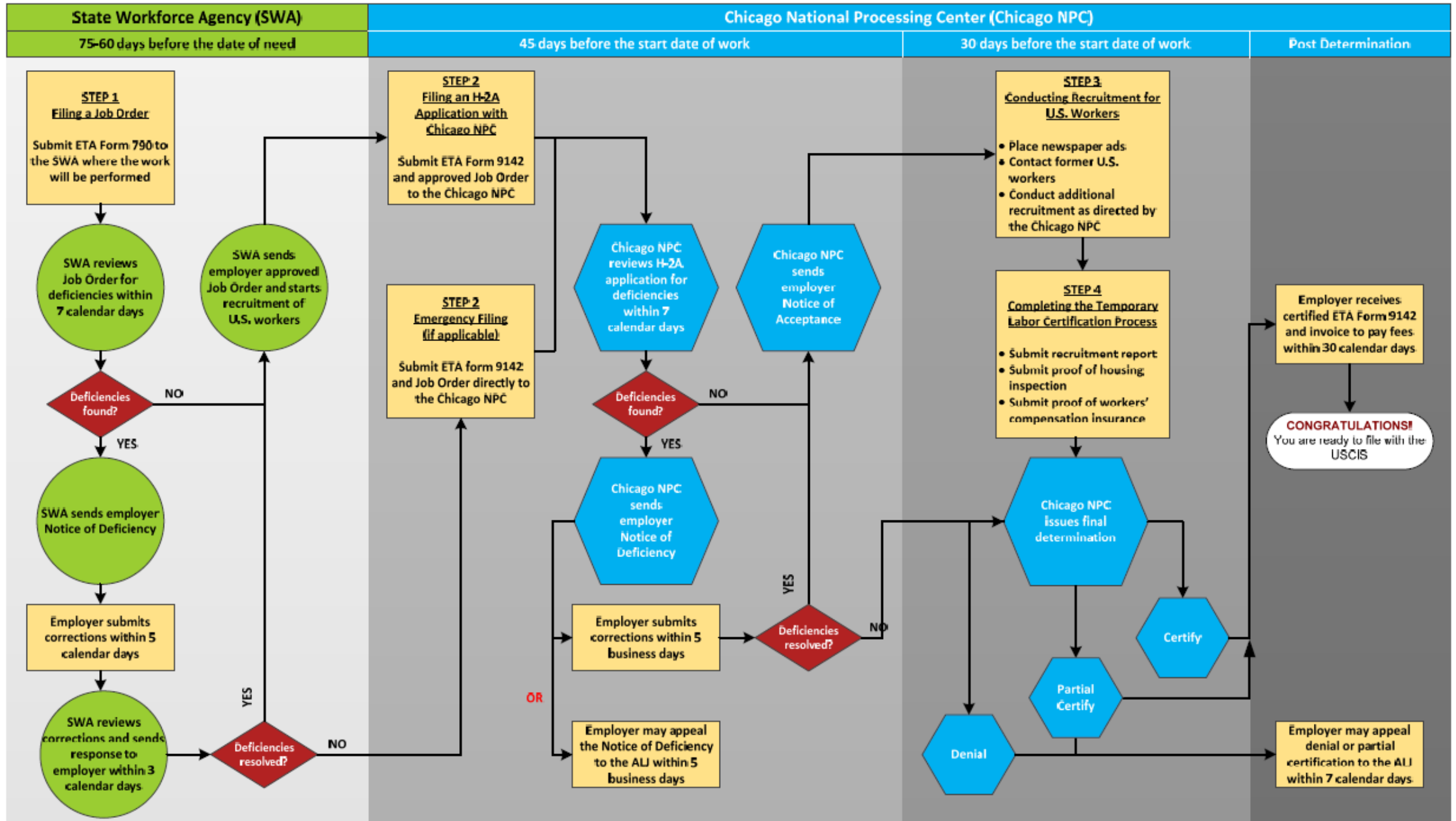
**AGRICULTURAL
WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT**

H-2A Employer Eligibility

- Must be an employer doing business in the U.S.
- The work must be agricultural in nature.
- Work must be full-time, at least 35 hours/week.
- The need for work must be temporary or seasonal. Normally 10 months or less.
- Growers, farm labor contractors, and agricultural associations



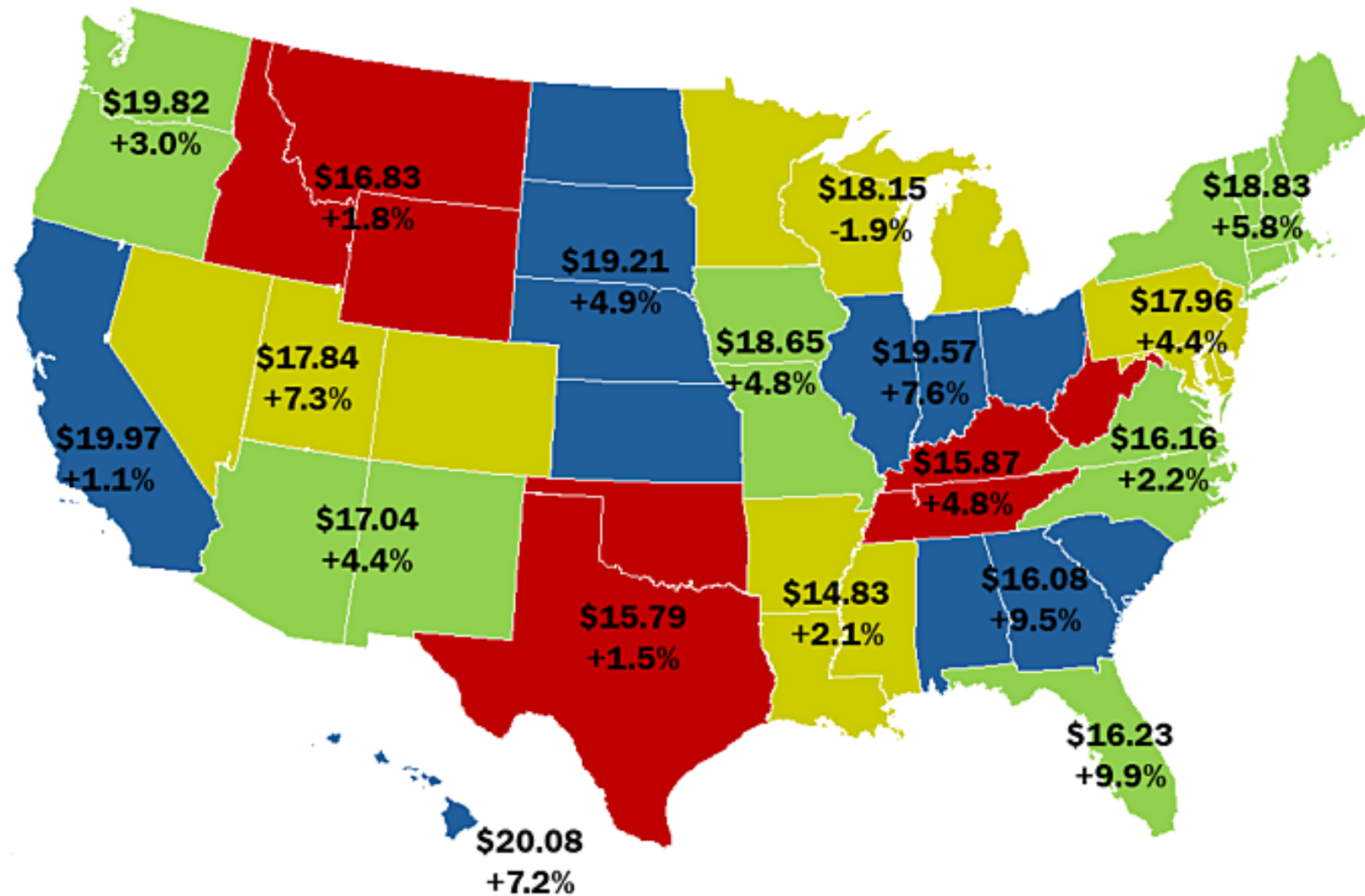
Appendix C. H-2A Application Process Flow Chart



Legend: = Employer Actions = SWA Actions = Chicago NPC Actions

H-2A is not cheap

2025 Adverse Effect Wage Rate



AFB American Farm Bureau Federation*

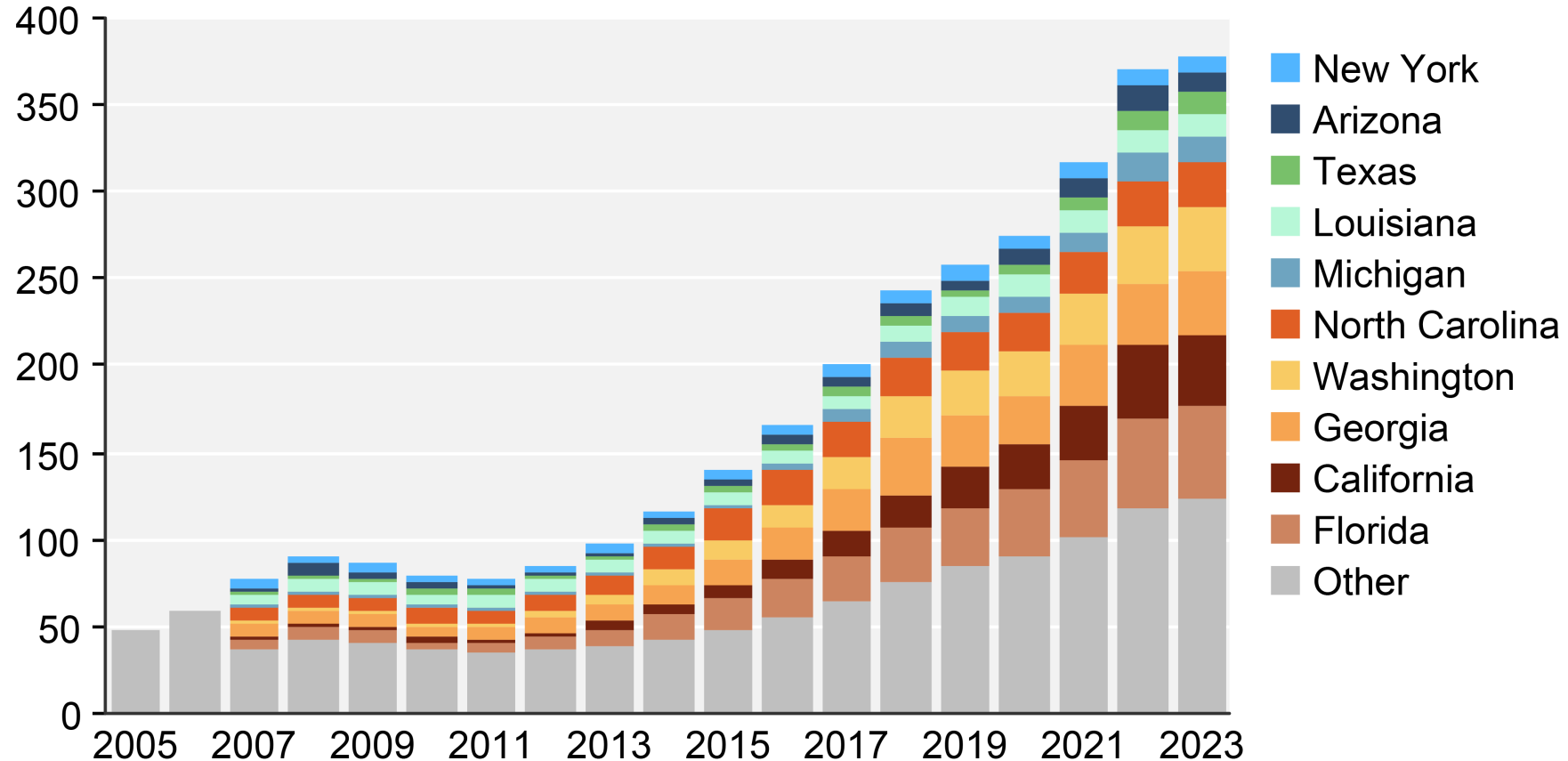
Non-wage H-2A costs

TYPE OF EXPENSE	COST
Labor Certification: Processing sole employers	\$100 application fee, plus \$10 per certified worker (not to exceed \$1000)
Non-Immigrant Worker Petition: Filing and asylum program fees	See the USCIS I-129 Fee Table;
H-2A Visa Application: Consulate fee	\$190 per worker (worker must be reimbursed in first paycheck)
H-2A Visa Application: Border stamp fee	\$6 per worker
H-2A Visa Application: Agent fees	Approximately \$100 per worker
Transportation: Transport from home country to work site	\$400 to \$650 per worker (cost varies depending on the country of origin)
Transportation: Weekly travel to and from a grocery store and other incidentals	Cost varies
Miscellaneous Costs: Association fees if applicable	\$200
Miscellaneous Costs: Housing and livable fittings	Approximately \$9,000 to \$13,000 per worker

U.S. H-2A (temporary agricultural employment of foreign workers) positions certified by State, fiscal years 2005–23

Growth in certified H-2A positions

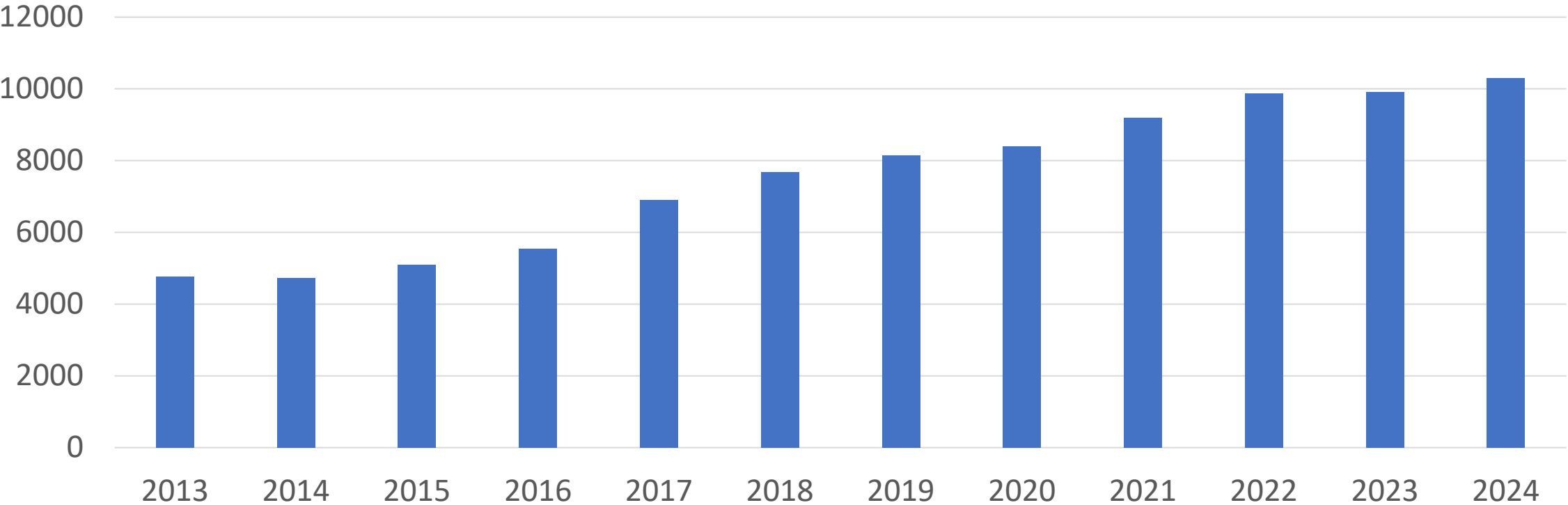
Seasonal positions certified (thousand)



Note: State-level data are not available for fiscal years 2005–06. Individual States identified in the chart were the top 10 in the number of H-2A jobs certified in fiscal 2023. About 80 percent of job certifications result in visas being issued to H-2A workers—some employers do not follow through to hire H-2A workers and some workers fill two certified jobs.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Foreign Labor Certification.

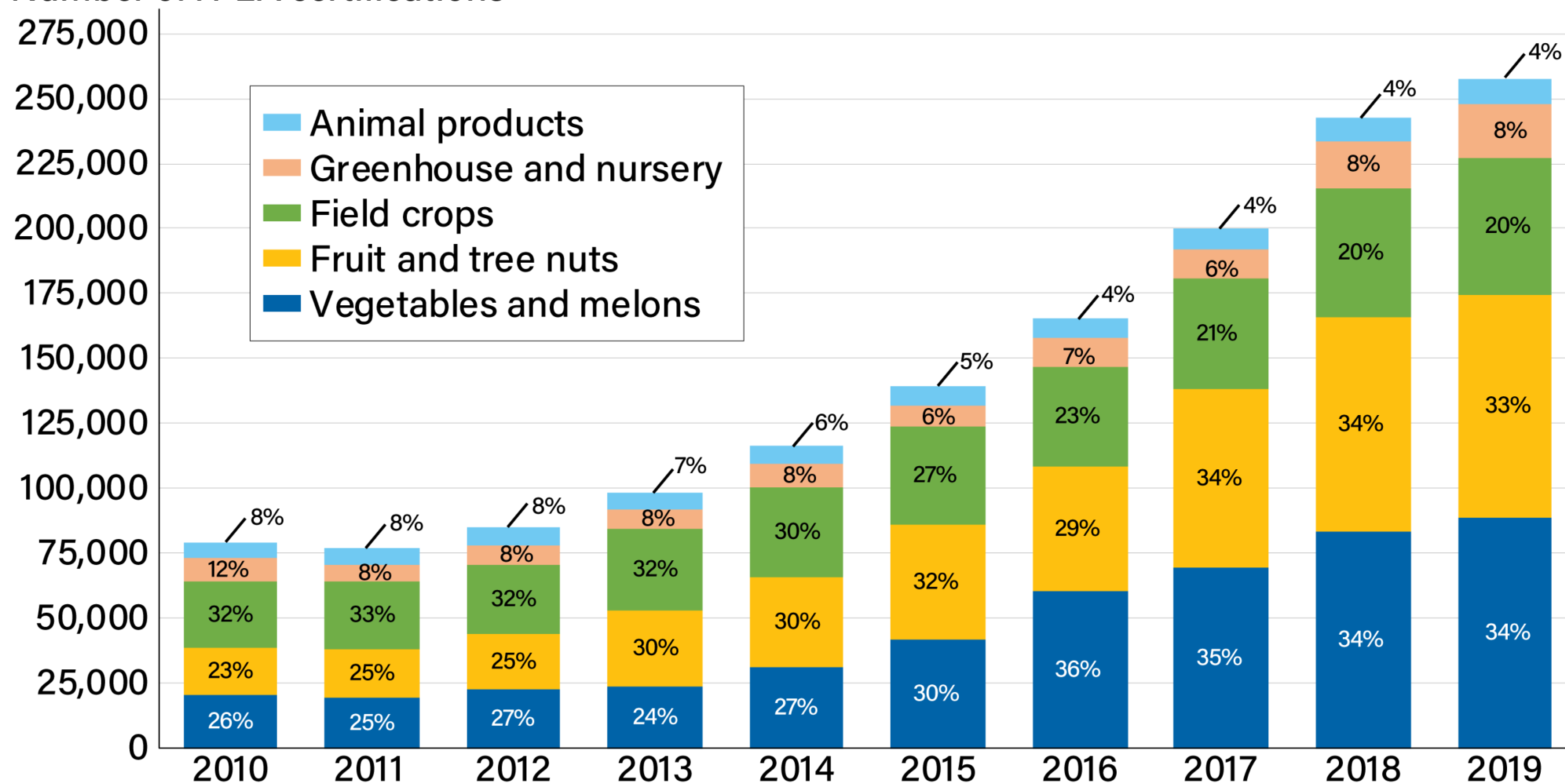
Growth in H-2A positions in New York



H-2A by Industry

H-2A certifications increased threefold between 2010 and 2019, growing across product categories

Number of H-2A certifications



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Foreign Labor Certification.

Typical, approved H-2A job in a Boardman, OR dairy is focused on trucking and field operations

Job Description

Full Time:

Yes

Number of Workers Requested:

8

Job Duties:

Commodity and Waste Equipment Operator. Deliver commodities to various locations at the dairy. Operate tractors, wagons, loaders and other equipment to load and move waste from one location to another. Operate and perform routine daily maintenance on commodity and waste tractors, trucks and loaders used at the dairy. Ensure equipment is in good working condition and adhere to all applicable safety rules. Assist mechanics to monitor, perform routine maintenance and repairs as needed; Agitators screens, pumps, flush system, grease, check hydraulic fluids daily and other Dairy equipment, follow all applicable safety procedures. Drive vehicles to haul workers, supplies, parts and tools.

Job Classification:

45-2091.00 - Agricultural Equipment Operators

Approved H-2A job in a Perry, NY dairy includes significant livestock work

Job Description

Full Time:

Yes

Number of Workers Requested:

5

Job Duties:

Crops/Commodities: Cattle. Perform farm duties related to tending livestock and transporting hay and feed around the farm, as needed (does not participate in any milk production and no day to day feeding/breeding duties): Duties may include the operation of various farm equipment. Equipment being operated may include, but is not limited to, tractors, vertical mixer wagon, pay-loader, skid-steer, auger, bale processor, and fork lift. Workers may perform maintenance on water tanks, feedlot equipment, and corrals. Job also requires processing incoming cattle, including unloading livestock in alley, vaccinating, weighing, branding and tagging, examining, and herding; sorting and shipping cattle; conducting the repair and maintenance of farm equipment and fencing, including maintenance of electric fence components; regularly cleaning and servicing equipment; mixing feed for auto feeders, lifting bags of mineral; identifying and treating sick cattle; assist with vet visits, assist with medication administration; and cleaning pens; snow removal; services and maintains snow removal equipment; de-icing of water banks; de-icing of feed banks;

Approved livestock- focused H-2A job in Merrill, WI

Full Time:

Yes

Number of Workers Requested:

2

Job Duties:

Performs any of the following tasks to attend to livestock: Administer medications/vaccinations; Check cattle feed & water equipment; Maintain cattle feed & water equipment; Clean livestock stalls with disinfectant; Confine livestock to stalls; Feed livestock; Inspect livestock for illness/injury; Mix additives in feed; Collect and remove manure; Maintain heated watering system; Operate snow removal equipment; Break up ice in watering troughs; Cattle facility expansion. Livestock: Dairy Cattle Equipment : Tractors, skid steers, mixers, trucks, trailers, feeding equipment, manure handling equipment, loaders, manure dryer.

Job Classification:

45-2093.00 - Farmworkers, Farm, Ranch, and Aquacultural Animals

TN Visa for nonimmigrant professionals

- Agreement among U.S., Canada, and Mexico: originally NAFTA
- Permits Canadians and Mexicans “temporary entry into the United States to engage in business activities at a professional level.” If:
 - Their profession qualifies under the regulations;
 - The position in the United States requires a NAFTA professional;
 - They have a prearranged full-time or part-time job with a U.S. employer; and
 - They have the qualifications to practice in the profession in question.

TN Visa

- Bachelor's or veterinary degree required.
- Specifically listed farm-type jobs include:

**Agriculturist /
Agronomist
Animal Breeder
Animal Scientist
Apiculturist
Dairy Scientist
Entomologist**

**Horticulturist
Plant Breeder
Poultry Scientist
Range Manager /
Conservationist
Soil Scientist
Zoologist / Wildlife Biologist**



TN Visa

- Can stay up to 3 years, then seek extension or depart and reapply
- Spouses and families can come, not permitted to work but can study
- No cap on number of entries per year
- Inconsistent approvals
- See: [Ayoub, S. \(2024, October 25\). Agricultural Labor: The TN Visa Program. Market Intel from American Farm Bureau Federation.](#)

Looking Ahead



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Policy reform?

Farm Workforce Modernization Act of 2023

- Passed in the House during the 118th Congress.
- Would have provided:
 - Earned legalization for ag workers and 5-year visas
 - H-2A program opened to year-round employment
- Never taken up in the Senate
- What are the prospects for similar legislation in 2025?





Automation and AI in dairy



Automation and AI in specialty crops



Enhanced decisions and AI

- Better information and analysis can lead to better decisions.
- Apply available labor where it is really needed
 - Checking 10 cows without AI
 - Checking only 2 cows with AI is a big labor savings
- Technology must enhance the ability of human



Repetitive, less-skilled and heavy labor will be replaced



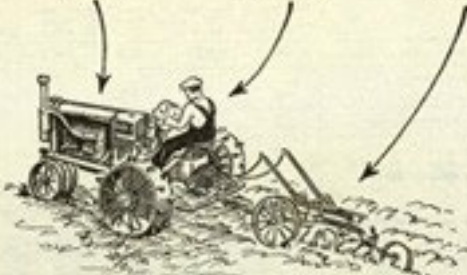
LOWERING FARM COSTS
with
GOOD EQUIPMENT

International Harvester Company
(Incorporated)
500 Michigan Ave., Chicago

Farm Management
Bulletin No. 5
Jan. 5, 1932

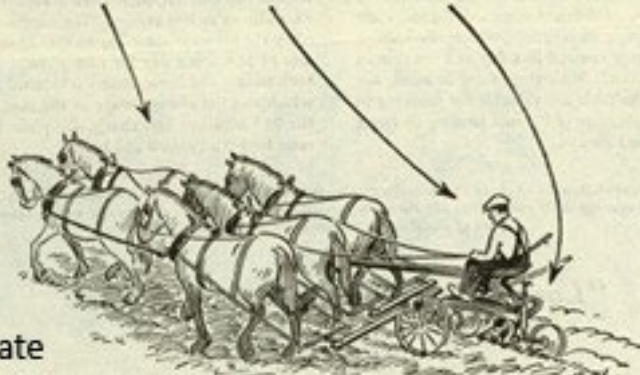
**FARMALL AND TWO 14-INCH BOTTOMS
PLOW 8.4 ACRES A DAY**

FARMALL COST	LABOR COST	PLOW COST	
\$ 4.48	\$ 2.89	\$.86	= 98¢ AN ACRE



**FIVE HORSES AND TWO 14-INCH BOTTOMS
PLOW 5 ACRES A DAY**

HORSE COST	LABOR COST	PLOW COST	
\$6.85	\$ 2.89	\$.86	= \$ 2.12 AN ACRE



Nebraska State
Historical Society

SEE OTHER SIDE

"Lower Costs Mean Higher Profits"

4-9317-1 3-4-1 Printed in U. S. A.

Wrap Up

- Farm labor will continue to be scarce and costly.
- Visa programs, H-2A and TN will continue to grow.
- Federal farm labor reform is possible...again!
- Investments in automation and AI will increase.

Thank you!

Questions?



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