



Economic Research Service  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

# Who uses H-2As? Examining program growth by sector and employer type

**Presentation for Farm Labor: Demand, Supply,  
Markets at U.C. Davis**

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# Preview of Presentation

- Agricultural Guest Worker Programs and H-2A
  - History of guest workers
  - Program administration and rules
- Research Findings
  - Program growth across all agricultural sectors and regions
  - Rapid growth among farm labor contractors
  - H-2A wage growth on par with farmworker wage growth
  - Contract lengths decreasing



## Background

- U.S. workforce in agricultural
  - 30% in 1920, 2% today
- Great migration in early 1900s
- Braceros program I (1917-1920)
- Braceros program II (1942-1964)
- BWI Program (1943-1951)
- H-2 Program (1952-1986) INA
- H-2A Program (1987-present) IRCA



Braceros circa 1945 (Wikicommons)





# Background

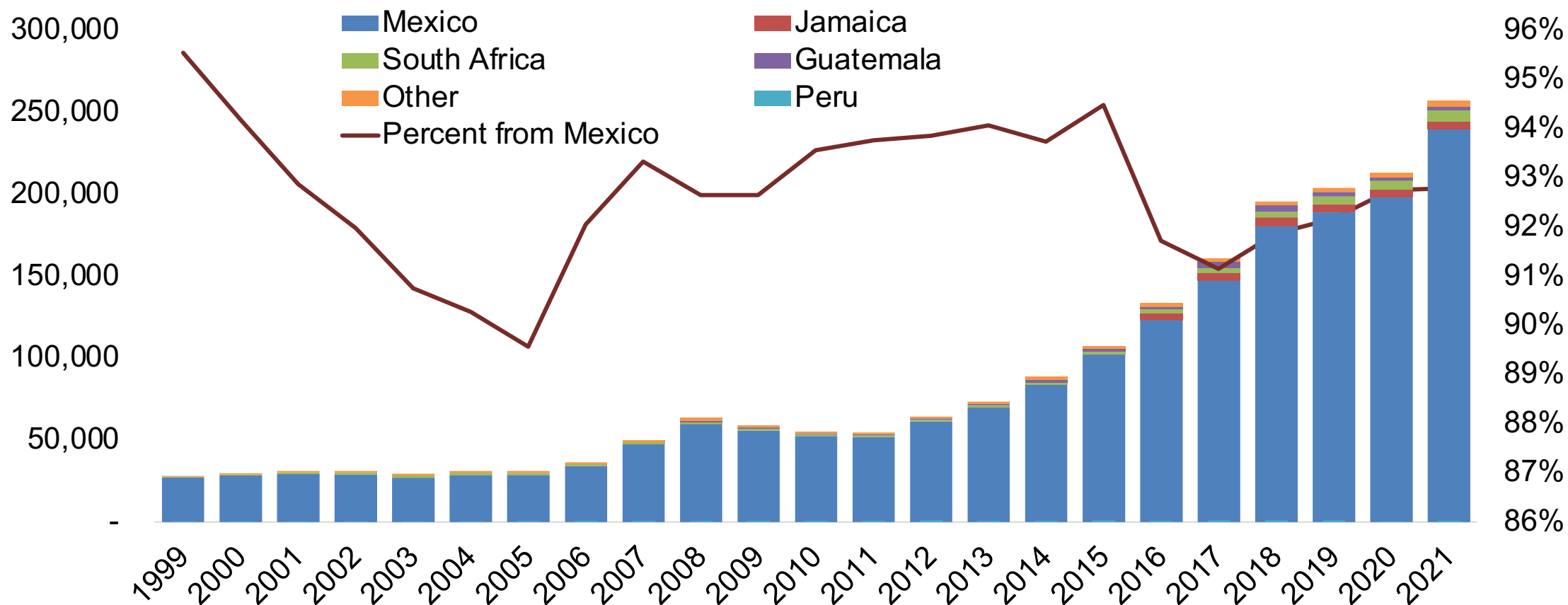
- Administered jointly by three agencies
  - DOL (U.S. Department of Labor)
  - DOS (U.S. Department of State)
  - USCIS (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services)
- Follows strict rules
  - ‘60-minute rule’
  - Three-quarter guarantee rule
  - Must pay H-2A Workers and corresponding domestic workers the adverse effect wage rate (AEWR)



# Number of H-2A visa admissions by country of origin

Number of H-2A visas issued

Percent share of H-2A visas issued to Mexicans

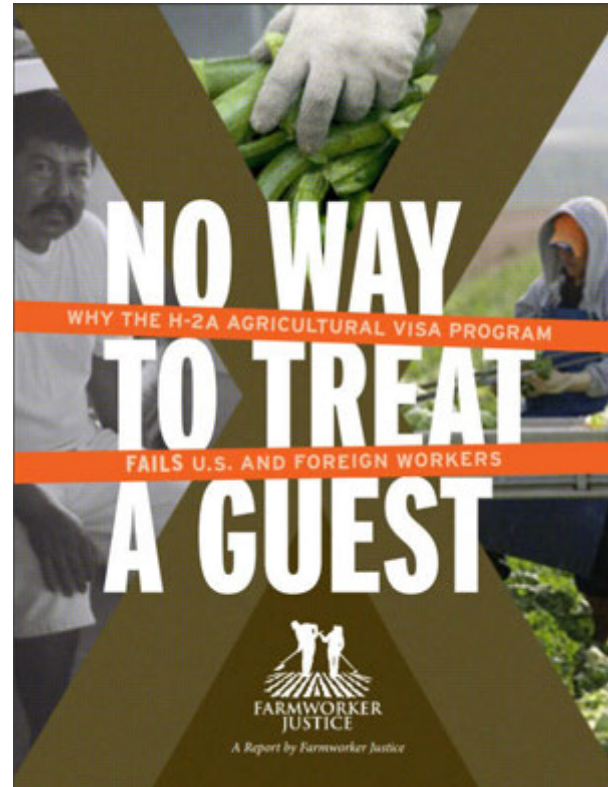
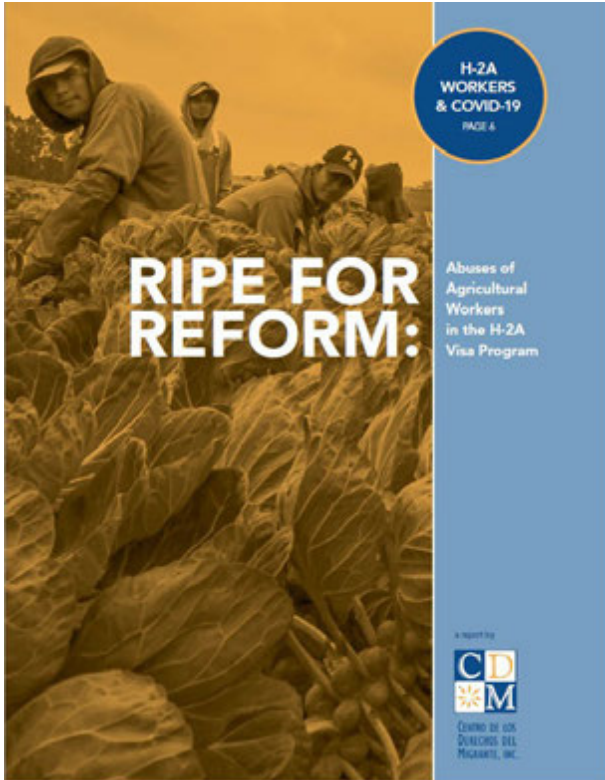


Source: U.S. Department of State: Nonimmigrant Visa Issuances by Visa Class and by Nationality, various years.

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/legal/visa-law0/visa-statistics/nonimmigrant-visa-statistics.html>



# Common criticisms of the program



- Labor Advocacy
  - Debt
  - Abuses
  - “Hurts” domestic workers
- Bureaucratic
- Expensive



# Agricultural Sectors

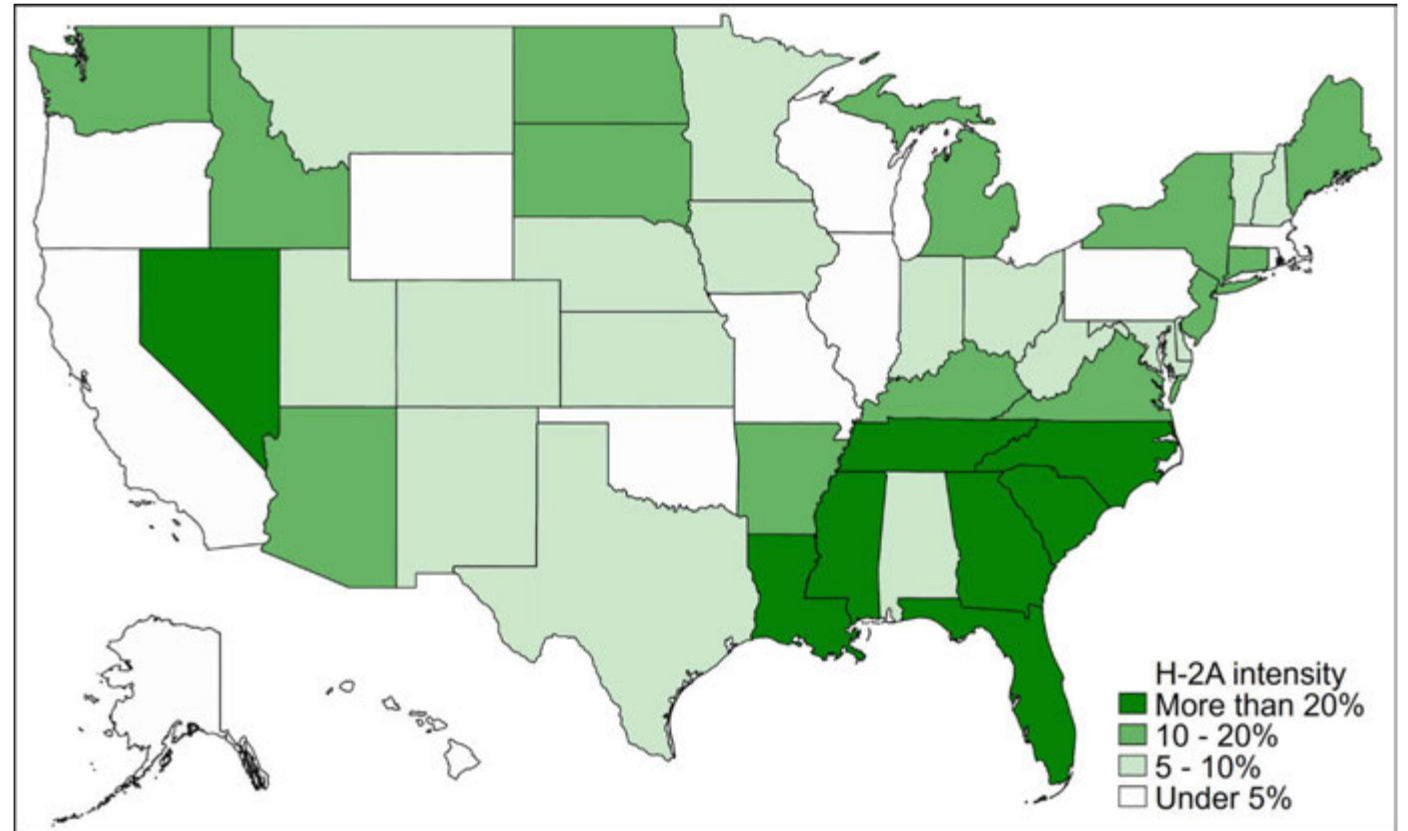
- Fruit and tree nuts
- Vegetables and melons
- Field crops
- Greenhouse and nurseries
- Animal products



# H-2A share of total labor expenditures is highest in the Southeast

- Top 6 H-2A employing states account for 55% of all H-2A certifications (FL, GA, WA, CA, NC, MI)
- H-2A intensity ratio is not commensurate with levels
- The Southeast is the most H-2A-intensive region in the United States, program is expanding on west coast.

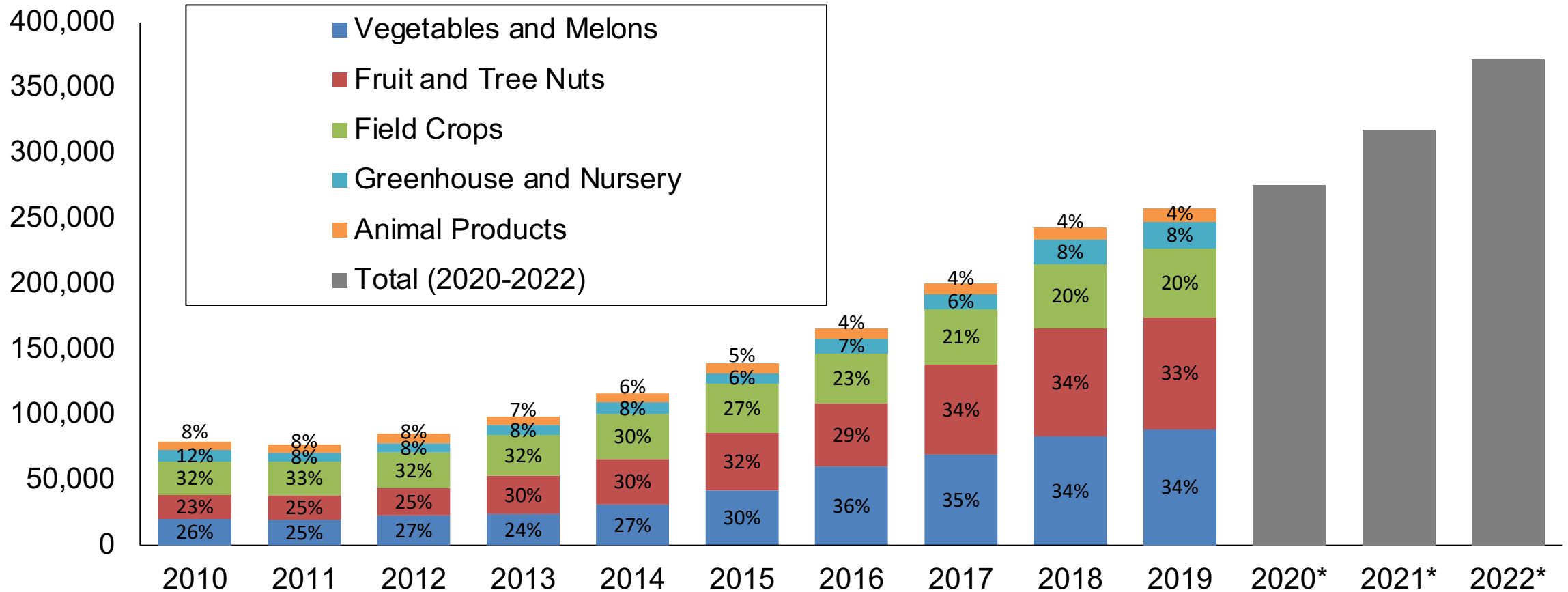
H-2A share of total hired labor expenditures, FY 2022





# H-2A certifications by sector

Number of H-2A  
certifications



Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding

\*sector level disaggregation not available for most recent years

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

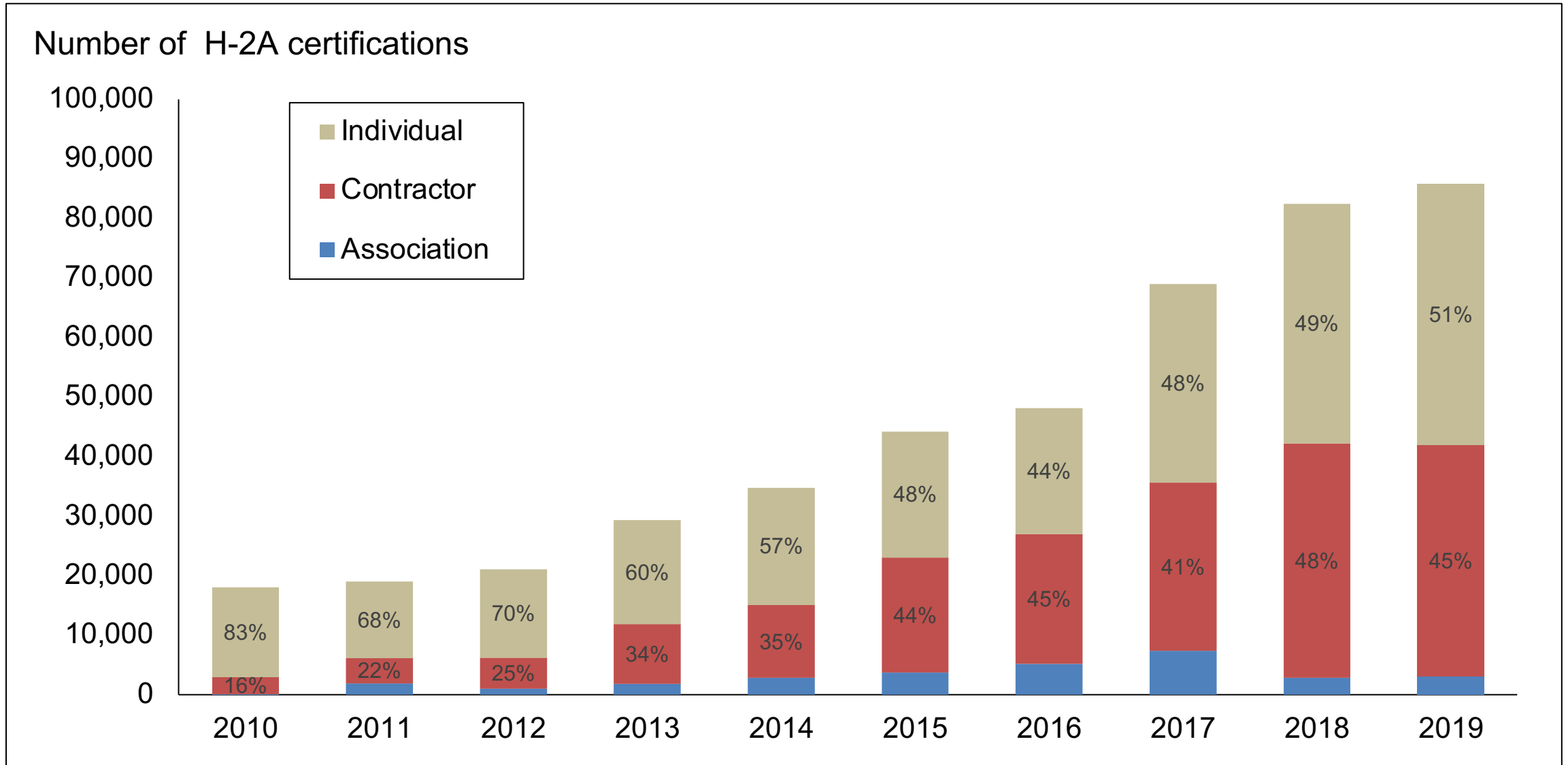


## Three types of employers

- Individual firms (employer and end user)
  - e.g. Peri & Sons Farms
- Growers associations
  - e.g. NCGA, WAFLA
- Farm labor contractors
  - e.g. Fresh Harvest Inc.



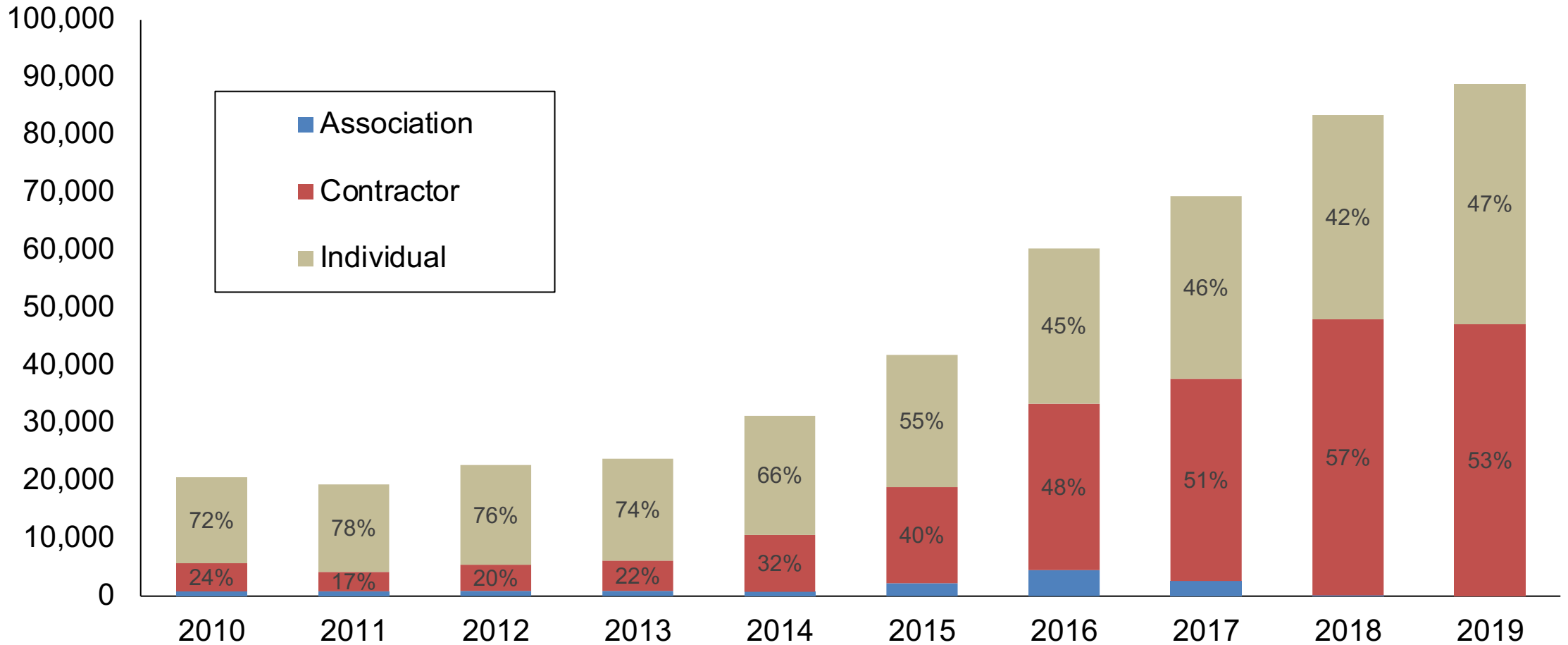
# Fruit and tree nuts sector certifications by employer type



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

# Farm labor contractors now majority of certifications in vegetables and melons sector

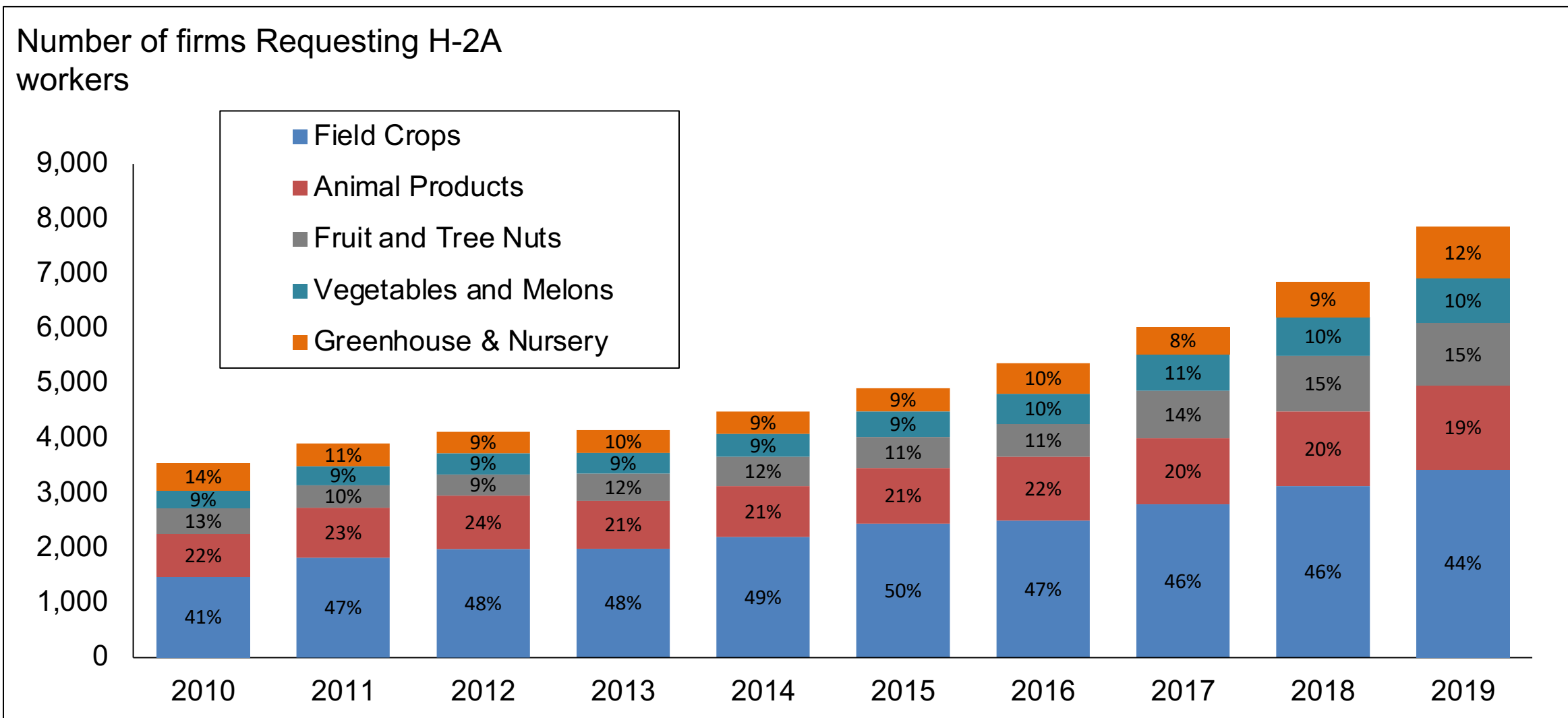
Number of H-2A certifications



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



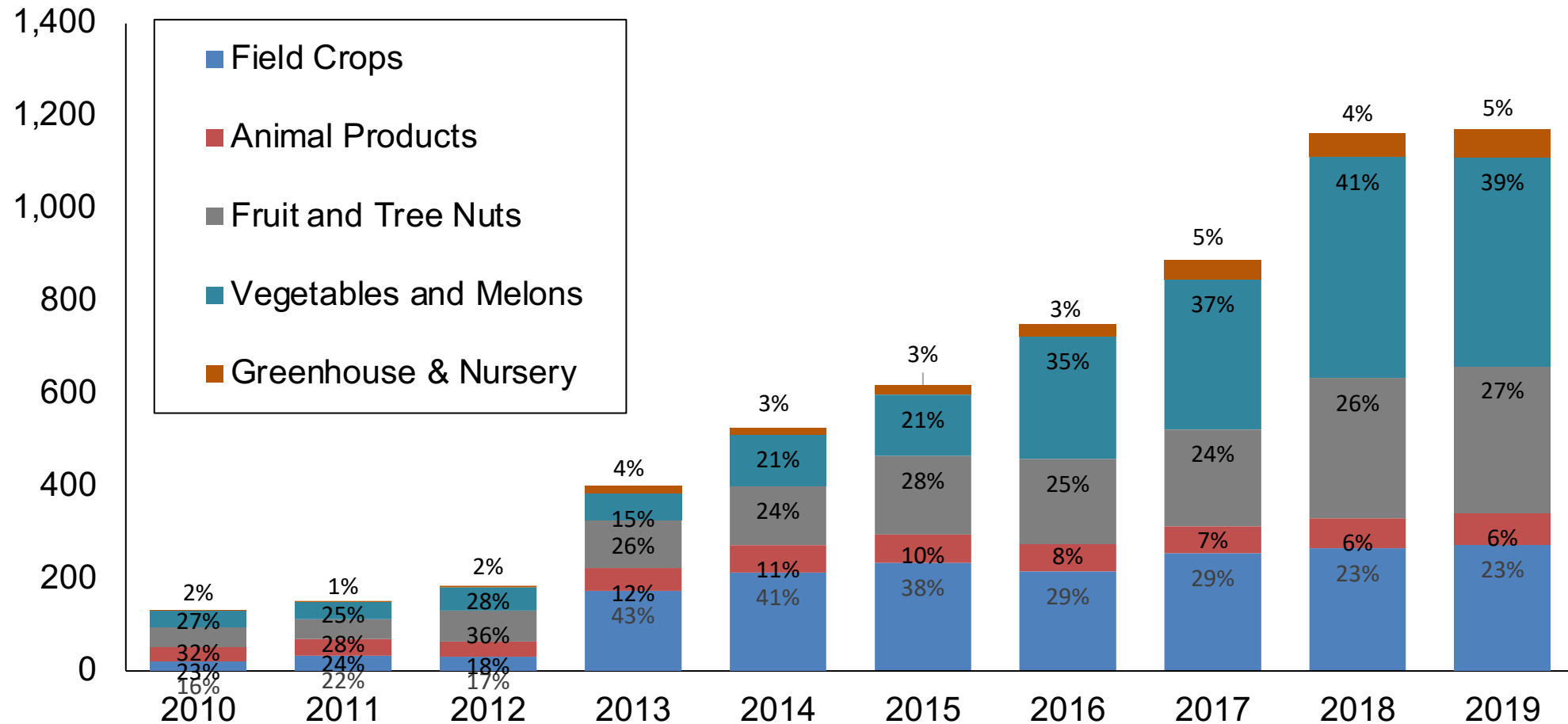
# Number of individual firms requesting H-2A increased 70%



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

# Number of FLC worksites using H-2A increases nearly 800%

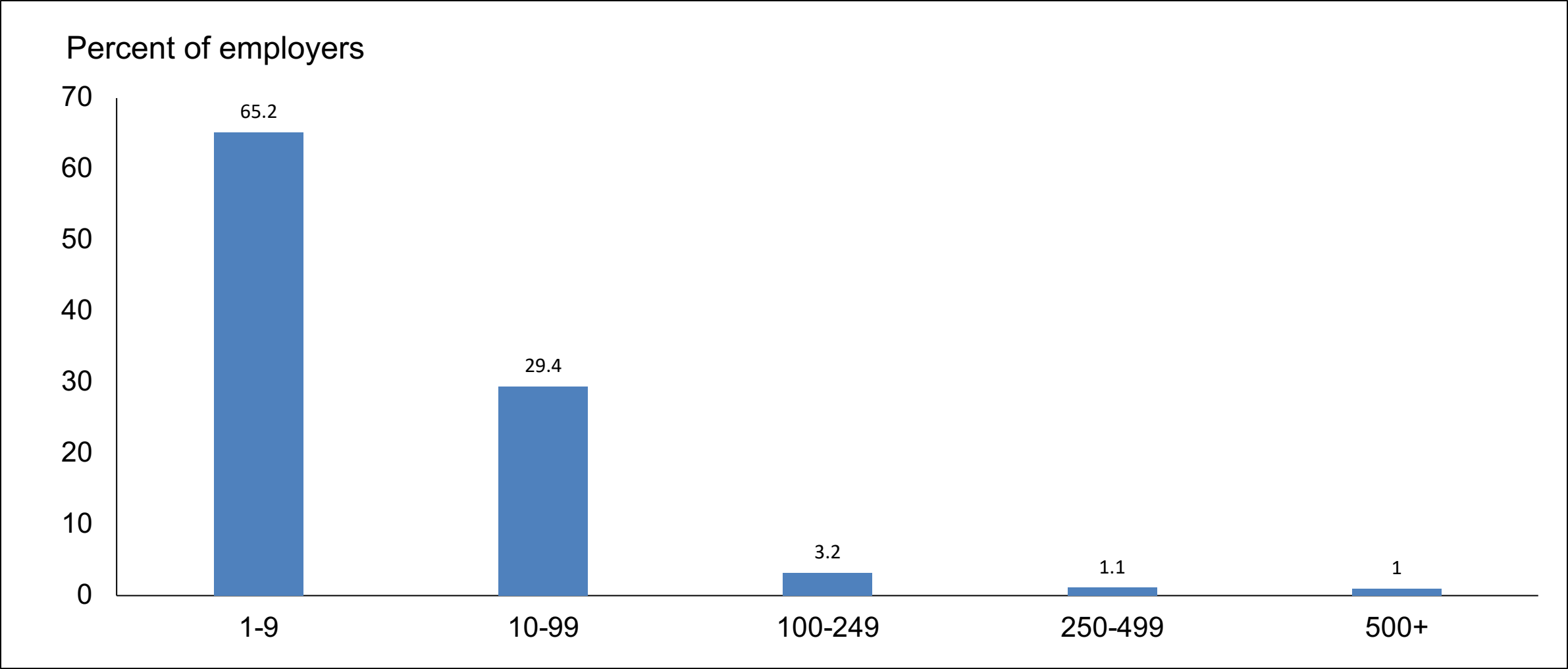
Number of firms employing H-2A



Note: Each worksite served by an FLC is counted as a separate employer

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

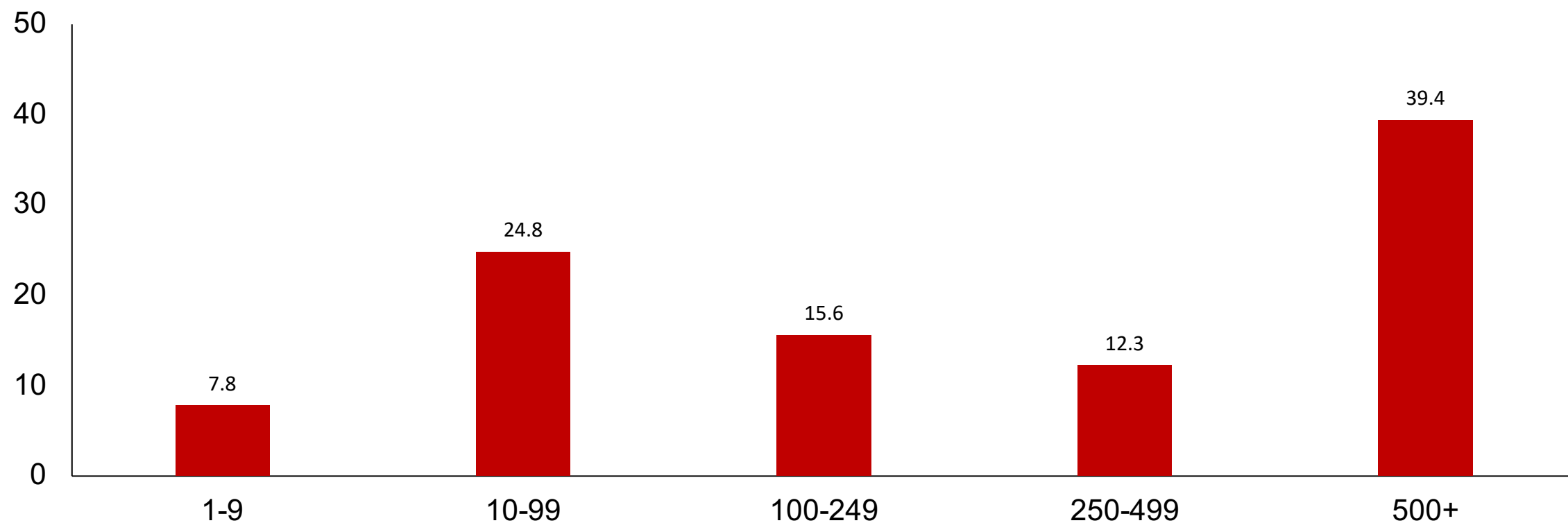
# Two thirds of employers in FY2022 were firms in the 1-9 and 500+ size ranges



Note: Around 12,000 H-2A employers  
Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Foreign Labor Certification

# Around 110 H-2A employers, each certified for 500+ jobs, accounted for 40% of all jobs in FY 2022

Percent of certifications

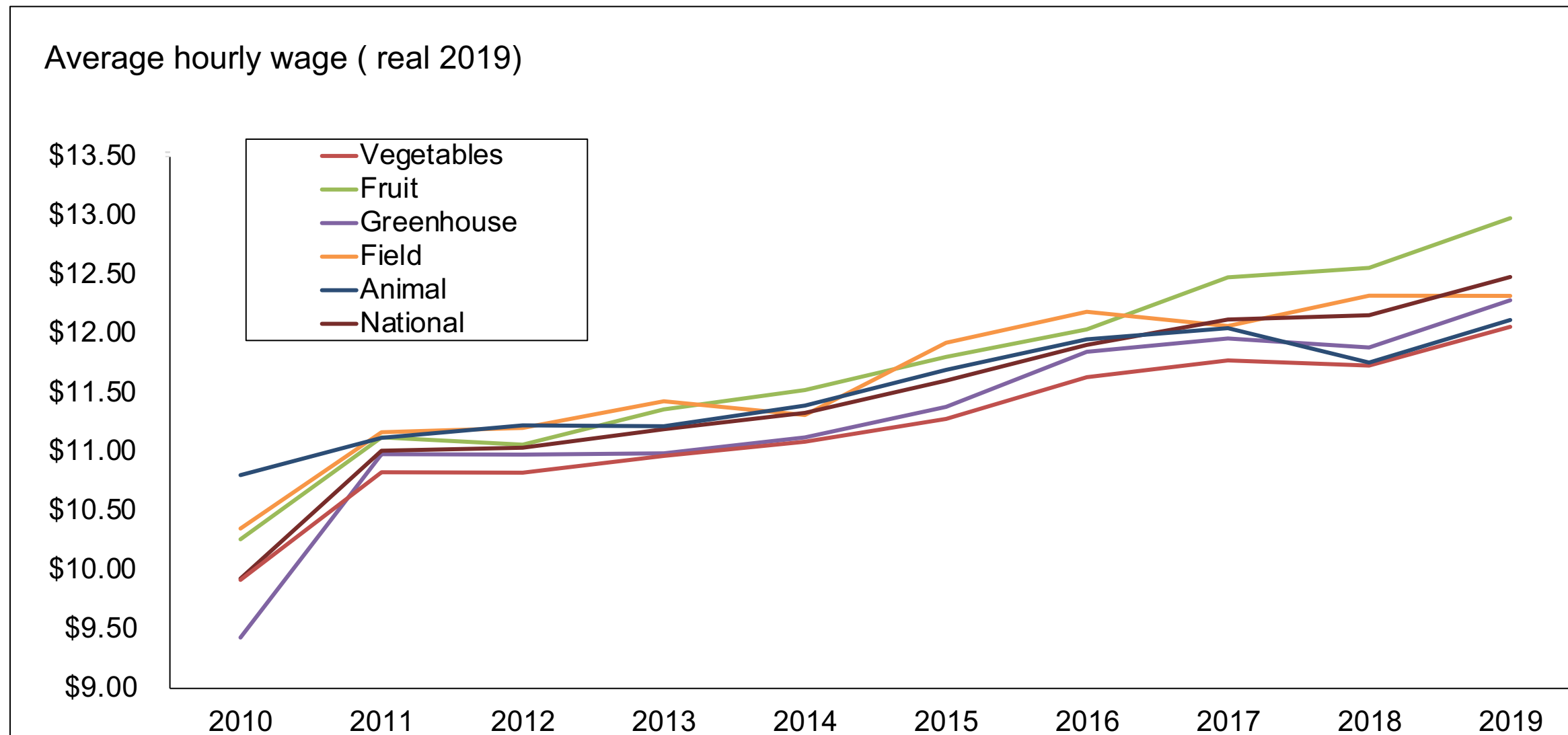


Note: Around 370,000 H-2A certifications

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

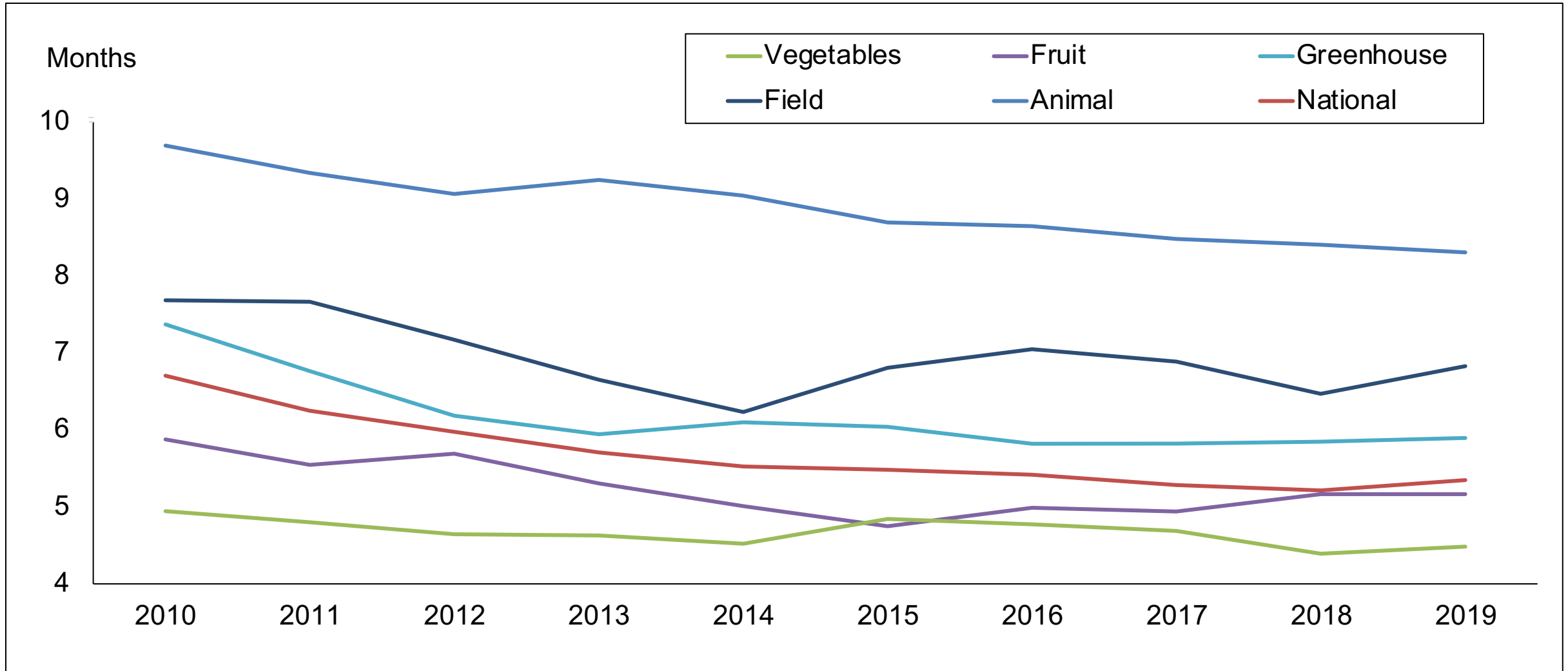


# Real average hourly wage of H-2A workers by sector



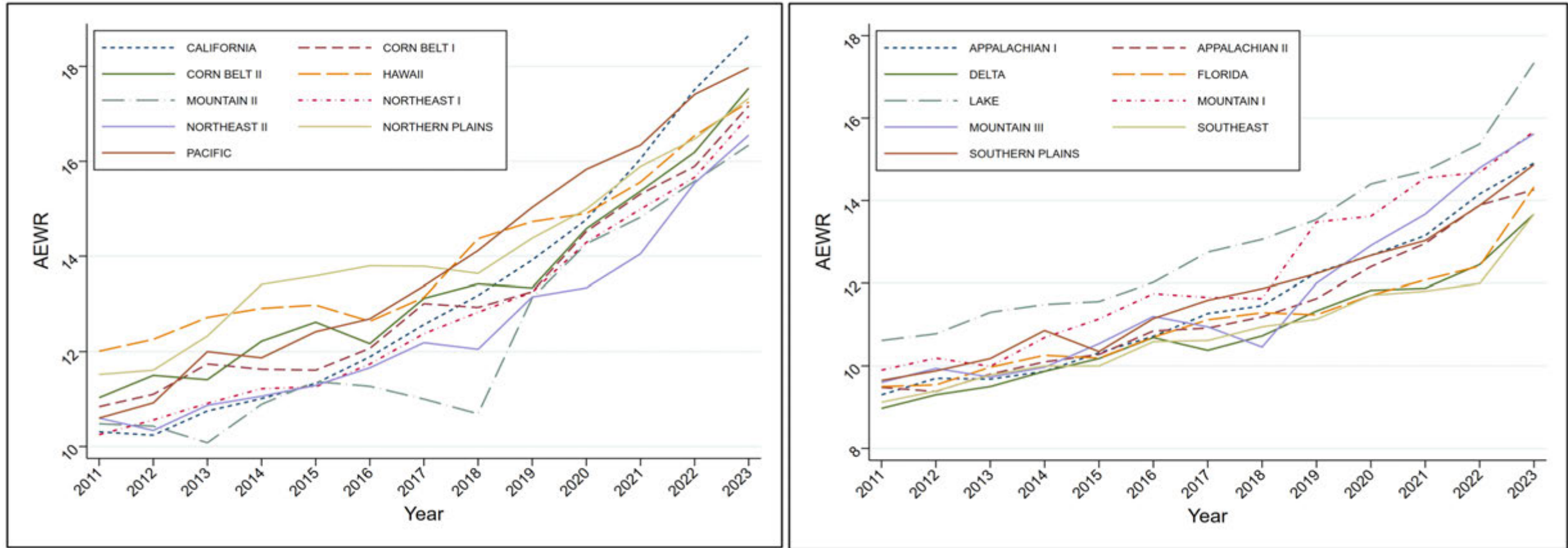
Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Foreign Labor Certification

# Average contract duration fell from 6.7 to 5.3 months (2010-2019)



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

## H-2A wages increased in all regions



- AEWRs rose 4% a year on average
- AEWR highest on West Coast and Midwest, lowest in Southeast



# Concluding Remarks

- Dramatic uptake in H-2A labor certifications (369%)
- Growth strongest in fruit and vegetable sectors
- Rapid program expansion among FLCs
- Real wages offered increased by 26%
- Average contract length decreasing
- Most firms are small but largest firms requested 40 percent of certifications







# Thank you for your attention!

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