



Economic Research Service  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

# ERS Research on Trends, Characteristics & Distribution of U.S. Farm Labor

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USDA Economic Research Service*

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**Economic Research Service**

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# Farm Labor Research At a Glance

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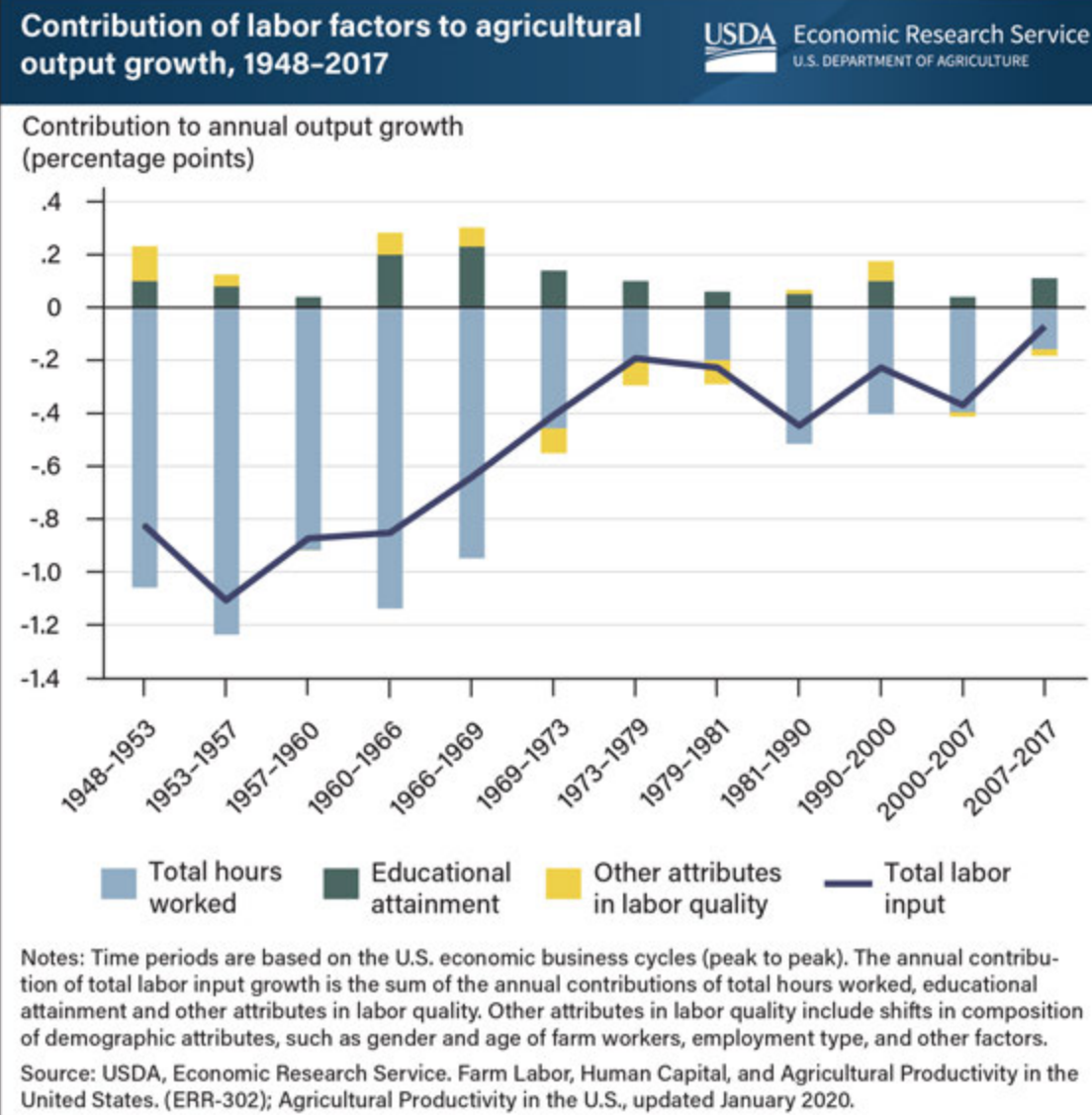
# ERS Farm Labor Reports

- **Farm Labor, Human Capital, and Agricultural Productivity in the United States**
  - Reports the contribution of farm labor in U.S. agricultural growth & the changing composition of the farm labor force.
- **What Did the Study Find?**
  - Total farm labor hours declined 83% between 1948 – 2017; self-employed & unpaid worker hours declined 88% & hired labor hours declined 73%.
  - U.S. agricultural output grew consistently even as labor input fell over time. Between 1948 - 2017, U.S. agricultural output grew by nearly 187% at average annual growth rate of 1.53%.



## Increases in Labor Quality Contributed to Growth in U.S. Agricultural Output

- While reduction of labor hours worked has contributed negatively, changes in labor quality have contributed positively to output growth over the years.
- Labor quality includes shifts in composition of demographic attributes, like gender, age, educational attainment, employment type & other factors.
- Except for the period immediately after WWII, the major source of labor quality changes was an increase in educational attainment among farmworkers.
- On average, the increase in educational attainment accounted for more than 90% of the changes in labor quality between 1948 - 2017.





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# U.S. and International Agricultural Productivity

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**Sun Ling Wang**  
Agricultural Economist



**Stephen Morgan**  
Research Agricultural Economist



# ERS Farm Labor Reports *(Continued)*

- **The H-2A Temporary Agricultural Worker Program in 2020**

- Analyzes (by state, industry, & type of employer) the job offers of U.S. agricultural employers who sought U.S. Dept. of Labor certification in FY '20.

- **What Did the Study Find?**

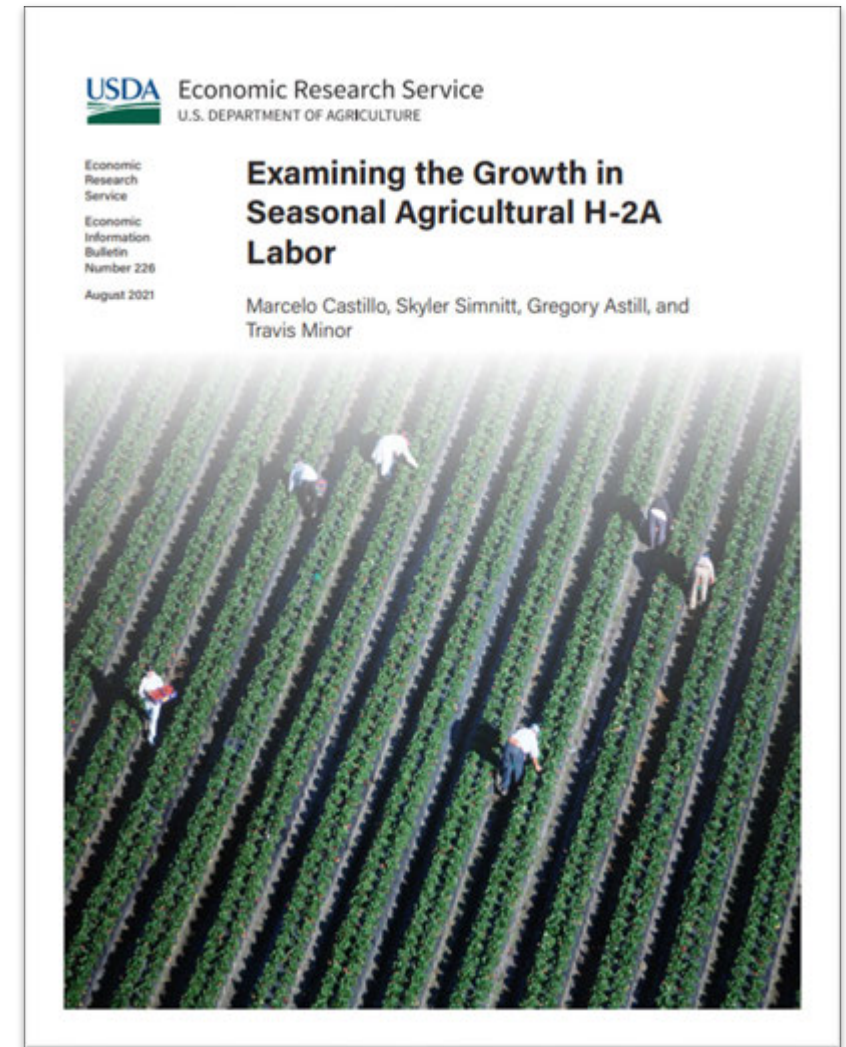
- Employers paid \$3.5 billion in wages to H-2A workers in FY '20.
- Nationally, the average H-2A contract offered 24 weeks and 39.3 hours per week at an average hourly wage of \$13.
- The top 1% of H-2A applicants (about 90 employers) received 40% of all H-2A certifications in FY '20.



# ERS Farm Labor Reports *(Continued)*

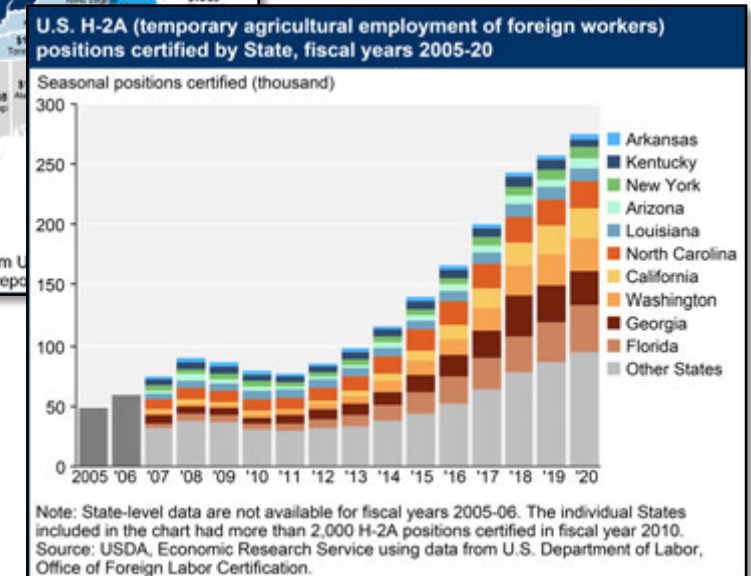
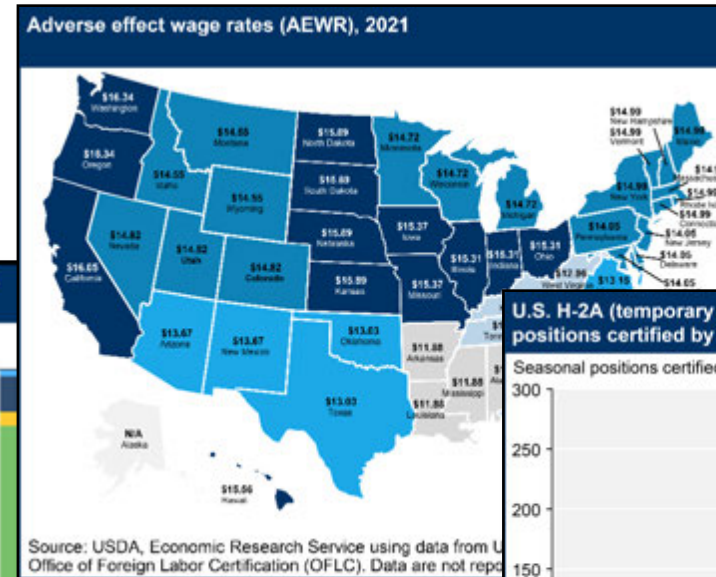
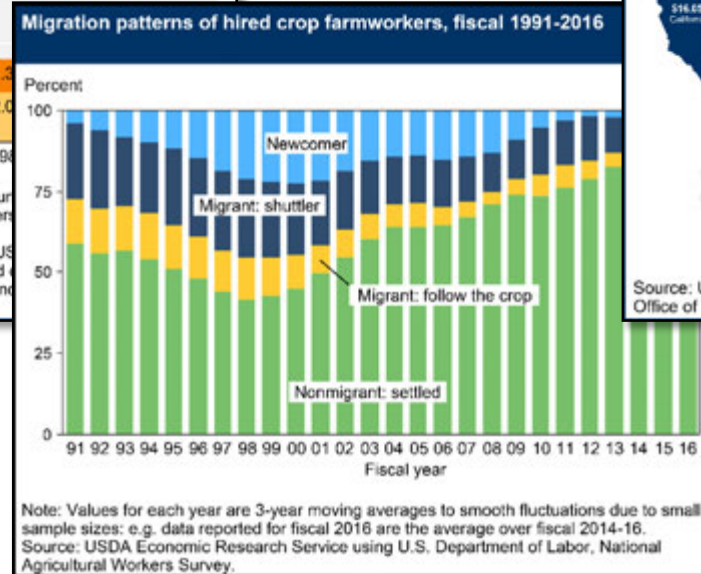
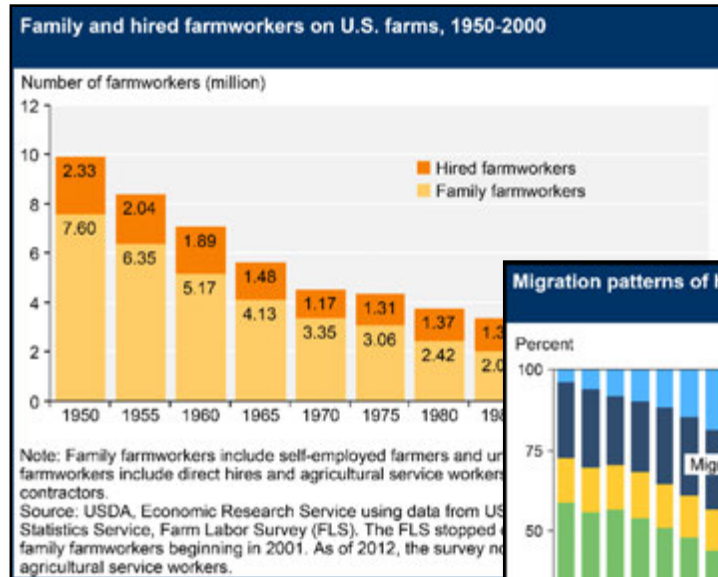
- **Examining the Growth in Seasonal Agricultural H-2A Labor**
  - Explores how H-2A usage levels differ by agricultural sector, geography, and by the type of firm requesting workers.
- **What Did the Study Find?**
  - The number of certified H-2A positions increased from 79,000 in 2010 to 258,000 in 2019.
  - H-2A employment growth was particularly strong in fruit, tree nuts, vegetables & melons. The combined share of H-2A positions certified in these sectors grew from 49 to 67%.
  - From 2010 - 2019, average duration of an H-2A labor contract decreased from 6.7 to 5.3 months, a 20% decline.

*More to come from ERS Economist Skyler Simnitt later today!*





# ERS Charts of Note on Farm Labor Research





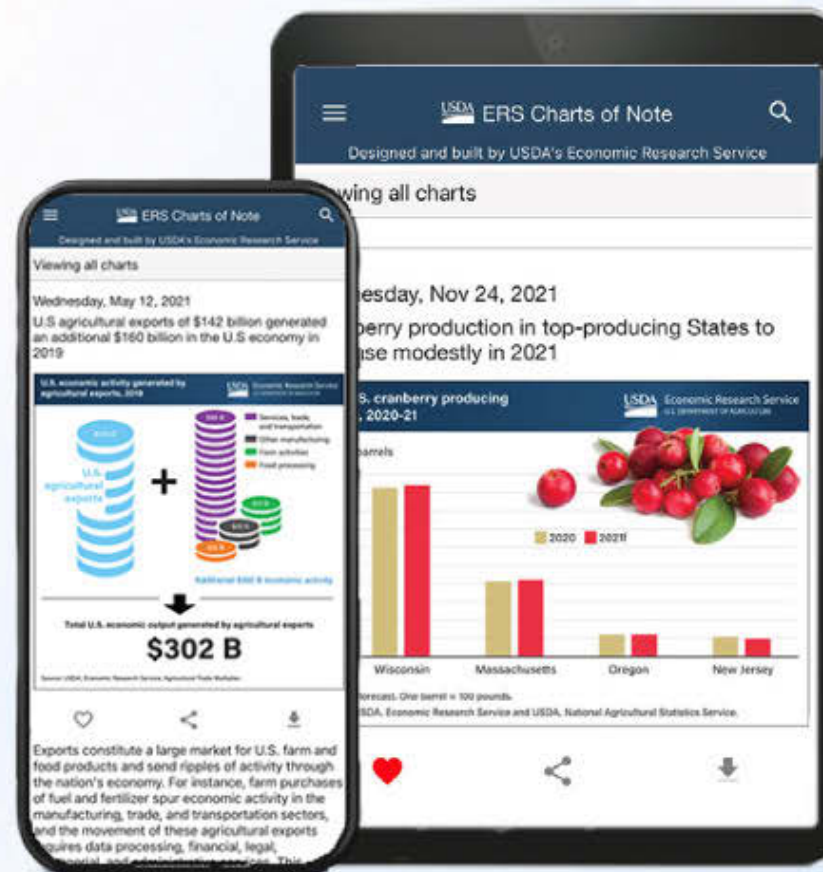


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# CHARTS of NOTE

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# ERS Amber Waves on Farm Labor Research

Feature: Agricultural Research and Productivity

December 05, 2022

## World Agricultural Output Growth Continues to Slow, Reaching Lowest Rate in Six Decades

by Stephen Morgan, Keith Fuglie, and Jeremy Jelliffe



Statistic: Agricultural Research and Productivity

October 27, 2022

## U.S. Agricultural Output Has Grown Slower in Response to Stagnant Productivity Growth

by Sun Ling Wang, Roberto Mosheim, Eric Njuki, and Richard Nehring



Feature: Farm Economy

February 17, 2022

## Increases in Labor Quality Contributed to Growth in U.S. Agricultural Output

by Sun Ling Wang, Robert A. Hoppe, and Thomas Hertz



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