Farm Labor

BUREAU OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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FARM EMPLOYMENT LOWER THAN YEAR AGO

There were 10,068,000 people working on farms the first of May, according to an estimate issued by the Department of Agriculture today. This is a decline of 4 percent from May 1, 1943, and of about 9 percent from the 5-year (1938-42) average for May 1. Although the number of unpaid family workers decreased only about 2 percent from last May, hired farm employment was down 13 percent.

Abnormally wet weather over most of the country the last of April prevented many farmers from getting into the fields and this accounted for some of the decrease in employment from a year ago, especially in the number of hired hands. The general scarcity of help also contributed materially to the decline. All of the geographic regions showed declines in estimated total farm employment, with the largest decrease occurring in the West South Central Region where the number of family workers dropped 3 percent and hired employment was down 18 percent from May 1, 1943.

Eighty percent of the farm work force May 1 was composed of farm operators and other unpaid family workers. In May 1940, 77 percent of the workers were either farm operators or members of their families doing farm work without receiving wages. The indications are that there has been a marked increase since Pearl Harbor in the number of women, and young boys and girls working on farms. The number of such farm workers usually increases during summer school vacations and when cotton chopping, the fruit harvest, cotton picking, and other farm work, which can readily be done by women and children, is in progress.

The crop season is late in New England and during most of April the soil was generally too wet for plowing or planting. In the Middle Atlantic States, truck crops are going into the ground although operations have been delayed in some area by excessive rains.

In the North Central States, the weather has been too wet and cold this spring to permit normal farm operations and hence fewer workers were needed than usual. However, as soon as more favorable field conditions exist the demand for workers will increase sharply. Because of the lateness of the season many farmers will be compelled to shift a considerable acreage from small grains to corn and other row

crops. Since these crops require more work in preparing the land and planting than do small grains, this will tend to increase the demand for labor during the next two months. The West North Central region indicated a drop of 19 percent in hired farm employment between May 1 last year and May 1 this year, the largest percentage decline for any region. Floods in the Missouri and Mississippi Valleys have delayed farm work and caused changes in crop plans with early maturing crops being substituted for those requiring a longer growing season. To put this flooded land into condition for crops will add greatly to the burden of work during the coming weeks if it is to be cropped this season.

Over most of the South, spring work on farms was far behind schedule on May 1 because of abnormal rainfall since January. The accumulated work will create a serious labor situation when it becomes possible to get into the fields, and some farmers are fearful that earlier planting intentions cannot be carried out. Where possible, however, corn, cotton, sorghum, tobacco, peanuts, rice, and other crops were being planted and the harvest of commercial vegetables in some areas was going forward at the beginning of the month.

In the Mountain States, lambing, calving, and sheep shearing were in progress, and farm and ranch activity in the Range country continued briskly despite inclement weather in some areas. Delay in the preparation of the soil and in seeding spring grains is adding to the heavy burden of work resulting from a decline since last May of 12 percent in number of hired workers on farms in this Region. Farm workers brought into the Mountain States from Mexico numbered about 2000 at the end of April and others are arriving almost daily. Such workers aided greatly in the production of crops last year.

Farm employment increased seasonally from April to May on the West Coast and was down only slightly from a year ago. Conditions were generally favorable for farm work around the first of May in this Region and farmers took full advantage of the opportunity. Hired farm employment declined sharply in most geographic regions but the Pacific Region recorded a decrease of only about 1 percent from a year earlier. The principal seasonal jobs now requiring large numbers of workers include the harvest of citrus fruits and various vegetable crops such as peas, lettuce, carrots, asparagus and early potatoes, the cutting and baling of alfalfa hay, thinning of apricots, peaches, and plums and sowing of spring grains.

Farm employment indexes and related data, United States, May 1, 1944 with comparisons

	Annual average 1910-14	Apr. 1 1943	May 1 1943	Apr. 1 1944	May 1 1944
FARM EMPLOYMENT (thousands of persons)	12,052	9,308	10,492	9,080	10,068
Family labor	9,160	7,433	8,248	7,401	8,079
Hired labor	2,892	1,875	2,244	1,679	1,989
FARM EMPLOYMENT INDEXES:					
Total -					
Unadjusted	100	77	87	75	84
Adjusted for seasonal variation	100	84	85	82	81
Family labor -					
Unadjusted	100	81	90	81	88
Adjusted for seasonal variation	100	84	85	84	83
Hired labor -					
Unadjusted	100	65	78	58	69
Adjusted for seasonal variation	100	83	84	74	74

Foreign workers employed in or available for agricultural war work by country of origin and State of employment as of April 29, 1944

Mexicans		Jamaicans		Bahamians		Newfoundlanders	
State	Number of workers	State	Number of workers	State	Number of workers	State	Number of workers
Ariz.	1,122	Conn.	1,019	Del.	82	Conn.	35
Calif.	21,227	Fla.	1,182	Fla.	4,871	Maine	37
Idaho	262	Mich.	22	Md.	118	Mass.	9
Mont.	353	N.Y.	193	Pa.	100		
Nebr.	45	Ohio	6				
Nev.	147						
Oreg.	593						
Wash.	1,508						
Wyo.	90						
Total	25,347	Total	2,422	Total	5,171	Total	81

Farm employment, United States and geographic divisions, May 1, 1944 with comparisons

TOTAL EMPLOYMENT

Geographic division	Mar. 1, 1943	Apr. 1, 1943	May 1, 1943	Mar. 1, 1944	Apr. 1, 1944	May 1, 1944
	1,000's	1,000's	1,000's	1,000's	1,000's	1,000's
United States	8,730	9,308	10,492	8,562	9,080	10,068
New England	213	223	246	207	217	232
Middle Atlantic	516	563	590	515	544	580
East North Central	1,266	1,335	1,437	1,251	1,313	1,414
West North Central	1,416	1,500	1,626	1,397	1,467	1,564
South Atlantic	1,658	1,758	2,083	1,625	1,723	2,002
East South Central	1,370	1,512	1,750	1,333	1,466	1,662
West South Central	1,465	1,542	1,802	1,389	1,470	1,685
Mountain	374	398	427	373	390	411
Pacific	452	487	531	472	490	518
FAMILY WORKERS 1/						
United States	7,003	7,433	8,248	6,935	7,401	8,079
New England	156	161	169	150	158	159
Middle Atlantic	384	404	414	379	400	407
East North Central	1,072	1,123	1,166	1,067	1,118	1,167
West North Central	1,226	1,281	1,345	1,225	1,279	1,336
South Atlantic	1,280	1,361	1,603	1,263	1,357	1,583
East South Central	1,163	1,295	1,524	1,154	1,283	1,457
West South Central	1,157	1,209	1,404	1,126	1,203	1,359
Mountain	280	297	301	283	298	300
Pacific	285	302	322	288	305	311
HIRED WORKERS						
United States	1,727	1,875	2,244	1,627	1,679	1,989
New England	57	62	77	57	59	73
Middle Atlantic	132	149	176	136	144	173
East North Central	194	212	271	184	195	247
West North Central	190	219	281	172	188	228
South Atlantic	378	397	480	362	366	419
East South Central	207	217	226	179	183	205
West South Central	308	333	398	263	267	326
Mountain	94	101	126	90	92	111
Pacific	167	185	209	184	185	207

1/ Includes farm operators and members of their families doing farm work without wages.

Based on reports from 20,881 farmers who reported, for their own farms, the number of family and hired workers doing 2 or more days of work during the week of inquiry.

Farm Employment by Type of Farming Areas 1/: Total Number of Persons Employed on the First of Each Month and Index Numbers January 1943 to Date 2/

Year and month	Corn Area			Index 3/			Eastern Dairy Area			Index 3/		
	Family	Hired	Total	Family	Hired	Total	Family	Hired	Total	Family	Hired	Total
	000	000	000	000	000	000	000	000	000	000	000	000
1943												
Jan.	902	153	1,055	80	38	69	456	141	597	71	42	61
Feb.	865	171	1,036	76	43	68	464	157	621	73	46	63
Mar.	900	167	1,067	80	42	70	466	162	628	73	48	64
Apr.	941	183	1,124	83	46	73	488	179	667	76	53	68
May	983	230	1,213	87	57	79	498	211	709	78	62	72
June	1,026	245	1,271	91	61	83	495	243	738	77	72	75
July	1,013	285	1,298	90	71	85	555	321	876	87	95	90
Aug.	1,018	284	1,302	90	71	85	564	340	904	88	100	92
Sept.	1,022	266	1,288	90	66	84	545	319	864	85	94	88
Oct.	973	239	1,212	86	59	79	515	320	835	81	94	85
Nov.	1,012	247	1,259	89	61	82	510	235	745	80	69	76
Dec.	949	234	1,183	84	58	77	480	221	701	75	65	72
1944												
Jan.	892	152	1,044	79	38	68	456	145	601	71	43	61
Feb.	885	158	1,043	78	39	68	455	167	622	71	49	64
Mar.	909	147	1,056	80	37	69	458	166	624	72	49	64
Apr.	945	163	1,108	84	41	72	482	174	656	75	51	67
May	717	204	921	63	51	60	484	209	693	76	62	71

	Western Dairy Area						Middle Eastern Area					
1943												
Jan.	612	116	728	85	52	77	1,178	210	1,388	72	49	67
Feb.	597	120	717	83	54	76	1,206	223	1,429	73	52	69
Mar.	632	111	743	88	50	79	1,249	223	1,472	76	52	71
Apr.	657	130	787	91	58	84	1,286	248	1,534	78	58	74
May	688	155	843	96	70	89	1,437	264	1,701	87	62	82
June	734	169	903	102	76	96	1,624	311	1,935	99	73	94
July	768	190	958	107	85	102	1,658	338	1,996	101	79	97
Aug.	731	204	935	102	92	99	1,493	317	1,810	91	75	88
Sept.	712	192	904	99	86	96	1,523	325	1,848	93	76	89
Oct.	690	186	876	96	84	93	1,531	352	1,883	93	83	91
Nov.	687	165	852	95	74	90	1,433	274	1,707	87	64	83
Dec.	664	124	788	92	56	84	1,289	265	1,554	78	62	75
1944												
Jan.	605	116	721	84	52	77	1,195	207	1,402	73	49	68
Feb.	607	128	735	84	58	78	1,233	227	1,460	74	53	70
Mar.	619	115	734	86	52	78	1,240	225	1,465	75	53	71
Apr.	653	120	773	91	54	82	1,302	210	1,512	79	49	73
May	690	144	834	96	65	89	1,435	245	1,680	87	58	81

Continued -

Farm Employment by Type of Farming Areas 1/: Total Number of Persons Employed on the First of Each Month and Index Numbers January 1943 to Date 2/-Continued

Year and month	Eastern Cotton Area			Index 3/			Delta Cotton Area			Index 3/		
	Family	Hired	Total	Family	Hired	Total	Family	Hired	Total	Family	Hired	Total
	000	000	000	000	000	000	000	000	000	000	000	000
1943												
Jan.	644	180	824	46	57	48	725	101	826	67	40	62
Feb.	647	228	875	46	73	51	786	145	931	72	57	69
Mar.	741	255	996	53	81	58	820	148	968	75	59	72
Apr.	851	248	1,099	60	79	64	880	159	1,039	81	63	77
May	1,088	306	1,394	77	97	81	1,088	169	1,257	100	67	94
June	1,220	356	1,576	87	113	91	1,217	295	1,512	112	117	113
July	1,050	328	1,378	75	104	80	1,160	292	1,452	106	116	108
Aug.	834	330	1,164	59	105	68	940	207	1,147	86	82	86
Sept.	1,070	388	1,458	76	123	85	998	221	1,219	92	88	91
Oct.	1,280	433	1,713	91	138	99	1,282	392	1,674	118	155	125
Nov.	1,009	385	1,394	72	122	81	1,017	322	1,339	93	128	100
Dec.	772	245	1,017	55	78	59	884	293	1,177	81	116	88
1944												
Jan.	650	188	838	46	60	48	744	108	852	68	43	63
Feb.	685	226	911	49	72	53	779	133	912	71	53	68
Mar.	732	225	957	52	72	56	801	127	928	73	50	69
Apr.	829	203	1,032	59	65	60	877	130	1,007	80	52	75
May	1,037	257	1,294	74	82	65	1,020	142	1,162	94	56	87

	Western Cotton Area						Small Grain Area					
1943												
Jan.	693	230	923	72	92	76	513	75	588	84	41	74
Feb.	666	225	891	69	90	73	518	85	603	85	47	76
Mar.	702	204	906	73	81	75	536	82	618	87	45	78
Apr.	751	225	976	78	90	80	571	87	658	93	48	83
May	816	280	1,096	85	112	90	595	135	730	97	75	92
June	918	325	1,243	95	130	103	633	149	782	103	82	98
July	875	342	1,217	91	136	100	633	181	814	103	100	102
Aug.	784	290	1,074	81	116	88	641	210	851	105	116	107
Sept.	808	313	1,121	84	125	92	625	233	858	102	129	108
Oct.	929	322	1,251	96	128	103	591	177	768	96	98	97
Nov.	830	290	1,120	86	116	92	562	132	694	92	73	87
Dec.	722	279	1,001	75	111	82	535	110	645	87	61	81
1944												
Jan.	660	224	884	68	89	73	519	75	594	85	41	75
Feb.	632	190	822	66	76	68	515	78	593	84	43	75
Mar.	688	171	859	71	68	71	537	69	606	88	38	76
Apr.	740	175	915	77	70	75	564	74	638	92	41	80
May	809	230	1,039	84	92	86	586	105	691	96	58	87

Continued -

Farm Employment by Type of Farming Areas 1/: Total Number of Persons Employed on the First of Each Month and Index Numbers January 1943 to Date 2/ -Continued

Year and month	Range Area			Index 3/			Northwestern Area			Index 3/		
	Family	Hired	Total	Family	Hired	Total	Family	Hired	Total	Family	Hired	Total
	000	000	000	000	000	000	000	000	000	000	000	000
1943												
Jan.	168	59	227	111	58	90	182	39	221	114	50	93
Feb.	171	69	240	113	68	95	183	42	225	115	54	95
Mar.	177	666	243	117	65	96	196	43	239	123	55	101
Apr.	189	72	261	125	71	103	200	49	249	126	63	105
May	193	86	279	128	85	111	215	58	273	135	74	115
June	202	109	311	134	108	123	224	85	309	141	109	130
July	182	115	297	120	114	118	213	150	363	134	192	153
Aug.	203	124	327	134	123	130	218	192	410	137	246	173
Sept.	207	126	333	137	125	132	245	211	456	154	271	192
Oct.	201	113	314	133	112	124	205	133	338	129	171	143
Nov.	191	98	289	126	97	115	199	120	319	125	154	135
Dec.	183	77	260	121	76	103	192	80	272	121	103	115
1944												
Jan.	167	64	231	110	63	92	186	45	231	117	58	97
Feb.	175	56	231	116	55	92	194	43	237	122	55	100
Mar.	180	65	245	119	64	97	194	44	238	122	56	100
Apr.	190	60	250	126	59	99	203	48	251	128	62	106
May	192	76	272	127	75	108	207	59	266	130	76	112

1/ Corn Area: Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Iowa; Eastern Dairy Area: New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York and Pennsylvania; Western Dairy Area: Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota; Middle Eastern Area: Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky and Tennessee; Eastern Cotton Area: South Carolina, Georgia and Alabama; Delta Cotton Area: Mississippi, Arkansas and Louisiana; Western Cotton Area: Oklahoma and Texas; Small Grains Area: North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas and Montana; Range Area: Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah and Nevada; Northwestern Area: Washington, Oregon and Idaho.

2/ Includes farm operators and members of their families doing farm work without wages.

3/ 1910-14 = 100.

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