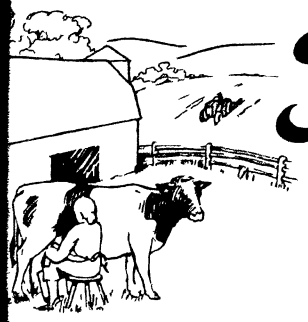

Farm Labor

BUREAU OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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FARM EMPLOYMENT LOWER THAN YEAR AGO

On the first of March this year 8,562,000 people were working on farms in the United States, the lowest number of record for that date, the Department of Agriculture reported today. The decline of 168,000 workers from last March is not all due to scarcity of workers, as bad weather on or about March 1 this year prevented field work in some sections of the country. However, there has, of course, been a definite decline in number of persons working on farms in recent years as is evidenced by the fact that farm employment this March is more than 4 percent less than in March 1940. Compared with the February 1 estimate of 8,383,000 persons the number of farm workers made about the usual increase for the month.

There was little change from a year earlier in the number of family workers on farms and most of the drop in total farm employment was accounted for by a decrease of about 6 percent in hired workers, about three fourths of which occurred in the South Central States. The decline from last year reflects unfavorable weather, for in many cases farm workers are hired only when it is possible to get into the fields and frequently many so-called "regular" workers are not paid, or paid only a small amount, for rainy days when they do incidental work on the farm.

The decline for the country as a whole reduced the number of paid workers March 1 to only 1,627,000 nearly a million less hired workers than were on farms 20 years ago. Over this period of years, however, there has been of course a marked increase in the production output per worker due to improved cultural practices and the increased use of machinery.

Crop correspondents, reporting on the length of day of farm operators and hired workers, indicated very little change in the hours worked per day by hired workers compared to March 1940 but reported that operators are putting in about an hour longer each day than they were four years ago. It is of interest that the U. S. average of 11.2 hours per day worked by farm operators is almost exactly the national average number of hours between sunup and sundown on March 1.

So far as farm employment is concerned the period around the first of March is usually somewhat unsettled. In some parts of the country March 1 is "moving day" for a great many renters who are shifting to another farm for the coming season. Obviously these people are not engaged in the routine farm jobs they normally would be doing at that time of the year. Also the weather is erratic, "coming in" sometimes like a lion and sometimes like a lamb and this affects the volume of farm employment. Farm operators at this period are trying to decide what their current

year's crop program will be but in many cases have not reached a final decision. These final decisions may sharply effect the number of persons hired for farm work the outcome depending on whether operators plan to produce crops with heavy labor requirements or to shift to crops that can be handled with relatively few workers.

Most farmers this year have the additional concern as to what effect the re-classification of deferred farm workers will have on their farm labor situation and their prospects of carrying out crop intentions for 1944. It is too soon to determine just what the outcome may be but there is no doubt as to the general uneasiness among farmers as to their operations this season.

Farm activity in New England is, of course, somewhat restricted at the beginning of March. However, farmers are looking ahead with some apprehension to the labor situation a few months hence. The general scarcity of farm labor has resulted in a strong demand for additional farm machinery. The weather in the Middle Atlantic States has been generally open and clear with ample opportunity for such farm work as is usually accomplished at this season.

In the North Central States, farm activity at the turn of the month was confined mostly to chores, hauling manure and other routine work. But some plowing and corn stalk cutting were accomplished, and in southern Illinois some oats were seeded. The weather was unfavorable for doing outside work in certain areas, particularly in western Kansas. As was the cause elsewhere operators were worrying about the difficulties they anticipate in obtaining adequate help later on - especially if the re-classification of draftees results in the loss of significant numbers of workers to the armed forces.

The condition of fields for working was quite varied throughout the South at the beginning of the month. In Virginia and Kentucky, for example, plowing was well advanced; but in North Carolina soils were too wet for breaking. In two States side by side, Alabama and Mississippi, almost opposite conditions prevailed for doing field work. In Alabama, farm work was in full swing but in Mississippi the weather was so unfavorable that little outdoor work could be accomplished. Over most of Texas farm work was at a standstill on or about March 1 owing to recent rains which left fields too wet to work.

In most of the Mountain States farm activity the first of March was largely confined to chores and such odd jobs as repairing machinery. The ground was still covered with snow or too wet for preparation for spring seeding. Early lambing was well underway in some few specialized areas but it will be some weeks before the principal lambing season starts. Ranchers are in somewhat of a quandary as to the labor situation they will confront when lambing becomes general.

The Pacific Region experienced the variable weather natural in an area extending north and south nearly 2,000 miles. Rainy weather prevailed over most of California the latter part of February but there were only a few jobs in progress that required large numbers of workers. Citrus harvest in the southern part of the State probably engaged more workers than any other single operation. In addition, harvest of vegetables in the Imperial Valley, and on a smaller scale in coastal areas, also employed considerable numbers of farm workers. Pruning was still in progress although much of it had been completed.

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

	Annual average 1910-14	Feb. 1, 1943	Mar. 1, 1943	Feb. 1, 1944	Mar. 1, 1944
FARM EMPLOYMENT INDEXES:					
Total-					
Unadjusted	100	69	72	70	71
Adjusted for seasonal variation	100	85	86	85	84
Family labor -					
Unadjusted	100	72	76	73	76
Adjusted for seasonal variation	100	84	85	85	85
Hired labor -					
Unadjusted	100	60	60	58	56
Adjusted for seasonal variation	100	90	88	87	82
FARM EMPLOYMENT (thous. of persons)					
Total	12,052	8,369	8,730	8,383	8,562
Family labor	9,160	6,638	7,003	6,702	6,935
Hired labor	2,892	1,731	1,727	1,681	1,627

Foreign workers employed in or available for agricultural war work by country of origin and State of employment as of February 26, 1944

Mexicans		Jamaicans		Bahamians	
State	Number of workers	State	Number of workers	State	Number of workers
Arizona	959	Connecticut	223	Florida	3,399
California	12,731	Florida	1,684	Maryland	37
Colorado	1	Michigan	20		
Idaho	2	New Jersey	194		
Montana	3	Ohio	6		
Nebraska	88				
Oregon	263				
Washington	49				
Wyoming	5				
Nevada	60				
Total	14,161	Total	2,127	Total	3,436

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

Geographic division	Jan. 1, 1943	Feb. 1, 1943	Mar. 1, 1943	Jan. 1, 1944	Feb. 1, 1944	Mar. 1, 1944
	1,000's	1,000's	1,000's	1,000's	1,000's	1,000'
TOTAL EMPLOYMENT						
United States	8,171	8,369	8,730	8,202	8,383	8,562
New England	207	216	213	201	211	207
Middle Atlantic	485	507	516	493	512	515
East North Central	1,233	1,218	1,266	1,223	1,234	1,251
West North Central	1,380	1,355	1,416	1,383	1,362	1,397
South Atlantic	1,463	1,524	1,658	1,477	1,584	1,625
East South Central	1,242	1,326	1,370	1,275	1,317	1,333
West South Central	1,400	1,426	1,465	1,366	1,344	1,389
Mountain	343	370	374	348	359	373
Pacific	418	427	452	436	460	472
FAMILY WORKERS 1/						
United States	6,615	6,638	7,003	6,622	6,702	6,935
New England	155	161	156	153	157	150
Middle Atlantic	371	378	384	373	373	379
East North Central	1,047	1,020	1,072	1,038	1,038	1,067
West North Central	1,197	1,155	1,226	1,200	1,175	1,225
South Atlantic	1,139	1,158	1,280	1,156	1,204	1,263
East South Central	1,079	1,123	1,163	1,095	1,133	1,154
West South Central	1,099	1,106	1,157	1,074	1,065	1,126
Mountain	263	271	280	262	275	283
Pacific	265	266	285	271	282	288
HIRED WORKERS						
United States	1,556	1,731	1,727	1,580	1,681	1,627
New England	52	55	57	48	54	57
Middle Atlantic	114	129	132	120	139	136
East North Central	186	198	194	185	196	184
West North Central	183	200	190	183	197	172
South Atlantic	324	366	378	321	380	362
East South Central	163	203	207	180	194	179
West South Central	301	320	308	292	279	263
Mountain	80	99	94	86	84	90
Pacific	153	161	167	165	178	184

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

Based on reports from 24,332 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.

Length of Farm Workday for Operators and Hired Workers, March 1, 1944 with comparisons

State	Operator		Hired help	
	March 1, 1940	March 1, 1944	March 1, 1940	March 1, 1944
Maine	12.0	11.9	9.5	9.2
New Hampshire	11.0	11.4	9.3	9.7
Vermont	12.0	12.0	10.7	11.0
Massachusetts	11.0	10.9	10.0	9.4
Rhode Island	11.0	10.1	10.0	10.0
Connecticut	11.3	11.5	10.1	9.9
New York	11.1	12.0	10.3	10.6
New Jersey	11.0	11.3	10.0	10.0
Pennsylvania	10.9	11.9	9.7	10.2
Ohio	10.6	11.4	9.3	9.6
Indiana	10.2	11.1	9.4	9.6
Illinois	10.1	11.1	9.7	10.3
Michigan	10.4	11.5	9.8	9.9
Wisconsin	11.4	12.3	10.9	11.5
Minnesota	10.7	11.6	10.2	11.0
Iowa	10.3	11.5	10.0	10.5
Missouri	10.7	11.6	9.6	9.7
North Dakota	9.6	10.8	9.5	10.2
South Dakota	10.0	10.7	9.8	9.7
Nebraska	10.0	11.4	9.5	10.1
Kansas	10.6	11.3	9.8	10.0
Delaware	11.0	11.9	9.7	9.4
Maryland	11.1	11.8	9.7	10.0
Virginia	10.8	11.5	9.5	9.5
West Virginia	10.2	11.0	8.9	9.1
North Carolina	10.2	10.8	9.2	9.2
South Carolina	10.3	10.7	9.2	9.8
Georgia	10.1	10.7	9.3	9.5
Florida	10.4	10.8	9.4	9.2
Kentucky	10.0	11.1	9.2	9.4
Tennessee	9.9	11.3	9.4	9.7
Alabama	10.0	10.9	9.0	9.6
Mississippi	9.6	10.6	9.4	9.3
Arkansas	10.3	10.8	9.4	9.2
Louisiana	10.1	10.6	9.3	9.2
Oklahoma	10.4	11.6	9.3	9.6
Texas	10.4	11.3	9.5	9.8
Montana	9.3	10.5	9.2	9.6
Idaho	10.0	10.7	9.0	9.3
Wyoming	9.7	11.2	9.5	9.6
Colorado	10.5	11.1	9.6	9.7
New Mexico	10.5	11.2	9.5	9.6
Arizona	10.3	10.7	9.3	8.9
Utah	10.3	9.9	8.3	8.1
Nevada	10.3	12.1	9.0	10.5
Washington	10.5	11.0	9.3	9.3
Oregon	10.5	11.1	9.2	9.1
California	9.7	10.2	8.8	8.8

Length of farm workday for operators and hired workers, March 1, 1944 with comparisons

Divisions	Operator		Hired help	
	March 1, 1940	March 1, 1944	March 1, 1940	March 1, 1944
New England	11.5	11.5	10.0	9.8
Middle Atlantic	11.0	11.9	10.0	10.4
East North Central	10.5	11.5	9.9	10.4
West North Central	10.4	11.4	9.9	10.3
South Atlantic	10.3	10.9	9.3	9.5
East South Central	9.9	10.9	9.3	9.5
West South Central	10.3	11.1	9.4	9.6
Mountain	10.1	10.8	9.3	9.4
Pacific	10.1	10.6	8.9	8.9
United States	10.3	11.2	9.5	9.7

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