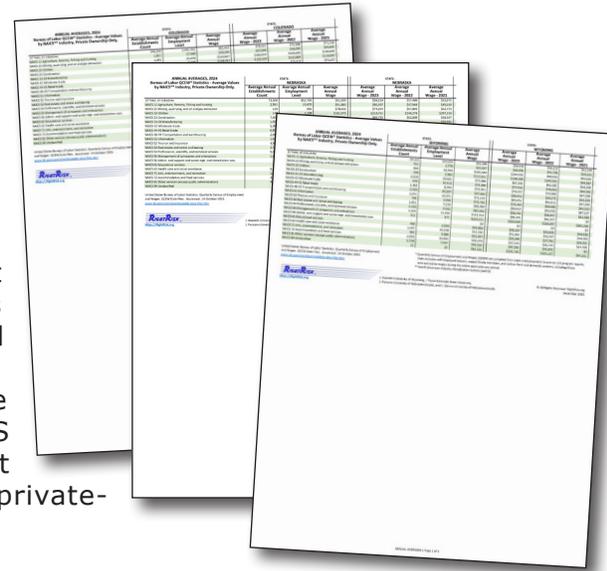


Annual Average Private-sector Wages by Major Industry, 2024 Comparison of the major industries in CO, NE, and WY

Labor costs are one of the fastest ways a ranch/farm budget can get sideways. One useful starting point is the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) annual averages by North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) main industry code.

These tables show average annual pay for covered workers by broad sector (construction, retail, transportation, and so on). They are not perfect, but they give you a clear view of what other industries can pay in your state when you are trying to hire and keep good people.

Note: Covered jobs are jobs reported through the unemployment insurance system. As a result, BLS tables do not capture every kind of work arrangement in agriculture and data reported here reflect only private-sector employment.



Key wage takeaways (2024)

- Colorado agriculture (NAICS 11) averages \$49,299, about 61% of the statewide private-sector average of \$81,423
- Nebraska agriculture averages \$51,883, about 85% of the statewide private-sector average of \$61,009
- Wyoming agriculture averages \$44,637, about 71% of the statewide private-sector average of \$63,096

Colorado

Colorado's statewide private-sector average wage is \$81,423, driven by very high-paying sectors like management (\$174,628) and mining and information (both about \$155,000). Agriculture averages \$49,299. That puts ag above retail (\$44,237) and accommodation and food (\$33,765), but below construction (\$81,400) and transportation and warehousing (\$77,490). If construction and trucking are busy in your area, expect stronger wage pressure and faster turnover.

Colorado reports about 2,435,701 covered private-sector jobs in 2024. The largest employment blocks include health care and social assistance (330,930), professional, scientific, and technical services (290,933), accommodation and food services (288,852), and retail trade (274,330). Together, those four sectors account for about half of all covered private employment, which helps explain why many ag employers feel constant competition for reliable workers. Agriculture (NAICS 11) reports 17,539 jobs, about 0.7% of the statewide covered private-sector total, spread across 1,811 establishments (about 10 covered workers per establishment).

Nebraska

Nebraska's statewide private-sector average wage is \$61,009, and agriculture averages \$51,883, which is closer to the statewide benchmark than in Colorado or Wyoming. Utilities is an extreme outlier at \$191,973, but the bigger day-to-day competitors for many ag hires show up in construction (\$70,276), wholesale trade (\$84,551), and transportation and warehousing (\$59,331). Nebraska's pattern suggests a tight but steady labor market where small changes in pay, scheduling, and supervision can decide who stays.

Nebraska reports about 852,765 covered private-sector jobs in 2024. The biggest employment sectors include health care and social assistance (138,627), manufacturing (104,349), retail trade (104,177), and accommodation and food services (82,850), again totaling about half of statewide covered private-sector employment. Agriculture reports 15,670 jobs (about 1.8% of the statewide total), but it also shows 2,591 ag establishments. That is about 3.5 percent of all private establishments in the state, which signals many small ag employers competing in the same labor pool. On average, that is about 6 covered workers per ag establishment.

Wyoming

Wyoming's statewide private-sector average wage is \$63,096, while agriculture averages \$44,637. Mining (\$106,694) and utilities (\$113,811) set a higher wage ceiling in many communities, and construction and transportation both run about \$71,000. Like Colorado, ag is higher than retail (\$37,842) and accommodation and food (\$28,244), but it can lose people quickly when energy and construction are hiring.

Wyoming reports about 214,253 covered private-sector jobs in 2024. The largest employment sectors reported are accommodation and food services (33,904), retail trade (30,207), health care and social assistance (26,258), and construction (23,621). Those four sectors alone make up more than half of statewide covered private-sector employment, so seasonal and service-sector hiring can materially affect who is available for ranch and farm work. Agriculture reports 2,770 jobs (about 1.3% of the statewide total) across 531 establishments, which works out to about 5 covered workers per ag establishment. In a small labor market, one or two employee departures can represent a big operational risk.

Three State Comparison

Across the three states, the wage gap between agriculture and the statewide private-sector average is largest in Colorado (about \$32,000), smallest in Nebraska (about \$9,000), and in the middle in Wyoming (about \$18,000). That gap matters because it tells you how hard it will be to "buy" labor when other sectors are recruiting.

A second point is direction: since 2021, agriculture's average annual wage rose in all three states, from \$43,665 to \$49,299 (12.9%) in Colorado, from \$45,019 to \$51,883 (15.2%) in Nebraska, and from \$39,623 to \$44,637 (12.6%) in Wyoming.

Management implications for agriculture

Treat wages as a range, not a single number. If you budget only for last year's pay level, you are betting that construction, energy, and transportation will not bid up your labor this year. Build a plan that includes one pay adjustment option, plus one non-cash retention tool you can actually deliver (housing help, consistent time off, clear job roles, or a simple season-end bonus tied to attendance and safety).

References

RightRisk. Labor Profiles, by Main NAICS Codes. (QCEW-based tables for CO, NE, and WY). <https://rightrisk.org/news.shtml> > Ag Labor Updates.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) – Employment and Wages, Annual Averages, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024.

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