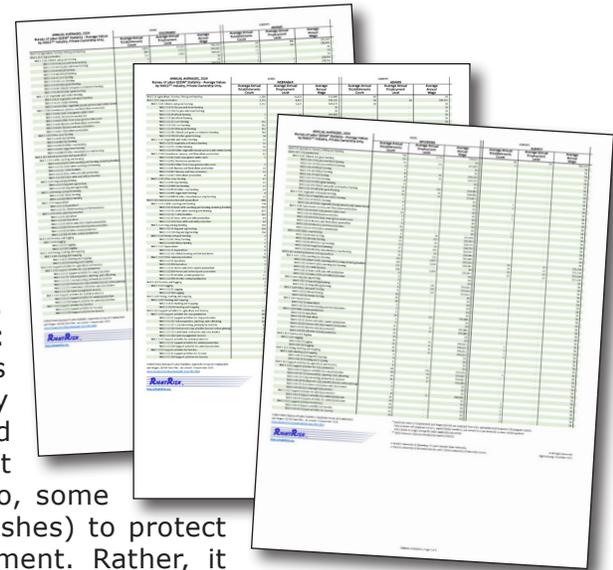


Agricultural Wages by County: 2024 Annual Averages for Colorado, Nebraska, and Wyoming

If you hire help, contract field work, run a feedyard, or manage a cow-calf outfit, your local labor market matters. One of the best ground-truth sources for county-level wage and employment signals is the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW). These data come from unemployment insurance records and are reported by industry using NAICS codes, including NAICS 11 (Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting).

A quick caution before we jump into results: QCEW data are private-sector businesses only, as reported in the referenced county profiles. They generally exclude proprietors and other self-employed owners, as well as several other groups that do not show up in unemployment insurance wage files. Also, some county-industry values are suppressed (shown as dashes) to protect confidentiality. That does not mean no ag employment. Rather, it usually just means not publishable at that level of detail.

The image shows three overlapping screenshots of data tables from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW). The tables are organized by state (Colorado, Nebraska, Wyoming) and then by county. Each table lists various NAICS codes, with a specific focus on NAICS 11 (Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting). The columns include details such as the number of establishments, total jobs, and average annual wages. Some cells contain dashes, indicating suppressed data for confidentiality.

Colorado, Nebraska and Wyoming statewide data

This comparison uses 2024 BLS QCEW annual average wage data to show how agriculture pay stacks up against other major local industries, which matters because those industries compete for the same workers you are trying to hire and retain. Statewide data reported under NAICS 11 provide an overall perspective on agricultural wages paid in the 3-state region. For more details, see recent RightRisk Ag Labor Updates released: 19 December 2025 and 30 October 2025.

Comparison of NAICS 11 with industry averages in CO, NE, and WY

- 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 county highlights

Across Colorado, the NAICS 11 private sector shows 1,811 ag establishments, 17,539 jobs, and an average annual wage of \$49,299. That statewide average is a useful anchor for budgeting labor cost risk, but the county-by-county spread is where the management value shows up.

One clear standout is Weld County, with 229 establishments, 3,935 jobs, and an average annual wage of \$56,572. That combination points to a deep, competitive ag labor pool and a strong presence of ag-related wage jobs. For operators, that usually translates into two practical realities: (1) it is easier to find workers here than in many rural counties, but (2) operators may need to work harder on retention and wage competitiveness.

Other counties illustrate how different different mixes of crop, livestock, and support-service employers show up in wage data. Morgan County reports 54 establishments, 859 jobs, and an average annual wage of \$53,454, while Larimer County shows 104 establishments, 900 jobs, and an average annual wage of \$44,530. Otero County comes in at 36 establishments, 237 jobs, and \$41,527 average annual wage. Even inside one state, these differences can matter when you set pay ranges, decide whether to use custom hire, or plan for seasonal labor.

Nebraska county highlights

Nebraska's statewide NAICS 11 profile shows 2,591 establishments, 15,670 jobs, and an average annual wage of \$51,883. Compared to Colorado, Nebraska shows more establishments but fewer total jobs, which is consistent with a labor footprint spread across many counties and operations.

County examples help show how wage jobs can show up in different places. Douglas County reports 43 establishments, 429 jobs, and an average annual wage of \$57,979. These data include jobs based on the employer's industry code, so NAICS 11 can include support-service firms (NAICS 115) that do work for farms and ranches. In some counties, that can make ag employment look larger because the payroll is reported where the service firm is based. Meanwhile, Brown County reports 15 establishments, 263 jobs, and \$51,544 average annual wage, and Seward County reports 48 establishments, 192 jobs, and \$54,528.

Nebraska also shows why managers need to read these tables carefully: some counties have suppressed totals for NAICS 11, but still publish details for sub-industries. For example, in Kearney County, the NAICS 11 total is suppressed, yet NAICS 111 (Crop Production) is shown with 111 jobs and an average annual wage of \$54,627. When you see this pattern, treat it as a confidentiality issue, not a signal that ag is absent.

Wyoming county highlights

Wyoming's statewide NAICS 11 profile shows 531 establishments, 2,770 jobs, and an average annual wage of \$44,637. That is a smaller wage-job footprint than Colorado or Nebraska, and the lower statewide wage level can influence hiring strategy, especially when competing with energy, construction, and government wages.

Several counties provide useful reference points. Park County reports 61 establishments, 354 jobs, and \$43,775 average annual wage. Laramie County shows 45 establishments, 325 jobs, and \$49,642, and Carbon County reports 29 establishments, 185 jobs, and \$49,637. Counties also vary widely on the low end: Weston County reports 44 jobs and \$26,655 average annual wage, while Big Horn County shows 146 jobs and \$34,427. For managers, this variation is a practical reminder that the local going wage can change a lot within one state.

Comparing the three states: what stands out

First, the scale differs in a way that can change your risk exposure. Colorado has the largest NAICS 11 wage-job count (17,539), Nebraska has the most establishments (2,591), and Wyoming has the smallest wage-job footprint (2,770). If you are recruiting, that often means Colorado has more depth, Nebraska has more spread, and Wyoming can feel tighter county-to-county.

Second, statewide average annual wages are not the same story in each state. Nebraska's statewide NAICS 11 average annual wage (\$51,883) is higher than Colorado (\$49,299) and Wyoming (\$44,637). Do not over-emphasize that number as better or worse. It usually reflects the mix of sub-industries (crop, animal, support services), the concentration of wage jobs, and where ag jobs show up on unemployment-insurance payroll records, not necessarily every form of ag work.

Third, suppression matters for decision-making. BLS publishes county-by-industry data, but it also withholds many detailed county values to protect employer confidentiality. If you see dashes, the safest approach is to: 1. Look for published subcategories like NAICS 111, 112, or 115, and 2. Use multiple information sources (neighbors, lenders, custom rates, local Extension) before you lock in a labor budget.

How to use this in your operation

A few practical ways to put these numbers to work:

- Use your county's NAICS 11 wage as a starting benchmark for setting pay rates and testing affordability.
- When totals are suppressed, check NAICS 115 (support activities) if you rely on custom hire or seasonal crews.
- Track the last 3 years of county figures to spot trends before it shows up in your cash flow.
- A suppressed county total does not prevent pay planning; if crop production or support-service wages are published, those figures often provide a workable lower and upper bound for setting competitive rates.

Recent Reports on Agricultural Data

Reports for NAICS agricultural sector codes have recently been compiled and released, providing 2024 Annual Average Wages and other county-level data for Colorado-CY, Nebraska-CY, and Wyoming-CY. These reports detail the annual statewide and county-level Establishments Count, Employment Level, and Average Compensation for each NAICS 11 sub-code where data are available. The Annual Average reports for counties in each state may be found at RightRisk Ag Labor Update on the RightRisk.org website.

For more information:

- For reports on agricultural labor statistics available from RightRisk, see: <https://rightrisk.org/news.shtml> > Ag Labor Updates.
- For reports on wages across the U.S. economy or to access the complete set of labor statistics available from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, see: <https://www.bls.gov>.