

Labor & Workforce

2025 NEW HAMPSHIRE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE STRATEGIC PLAN

Purpose: To understand the working conditions, wages, employment opportunities and availability, and the other adjacent issues of farming, fishing, processing, and distributing the food New Hampshire farmers and fishermen produce.

What’s at Stake?

Local food production can help strengthen access to food, particularly when global food supply chains are disrupted. Such local food production requires both available land, working waterfronts, and people to be successful. New Hampshire’s labor force shortage, as well as rising costs for living expenses, such as housing and child care, likely restricts the growth of local agriculture and seafood, as well as the ability of workers to join these professions. Investments to reduce costs for current farmers and fishermen and for people who would choose to become either, but face too many financial barriers to make the occupation feasible, may bolster local food production and agriculture.

Current Conditions

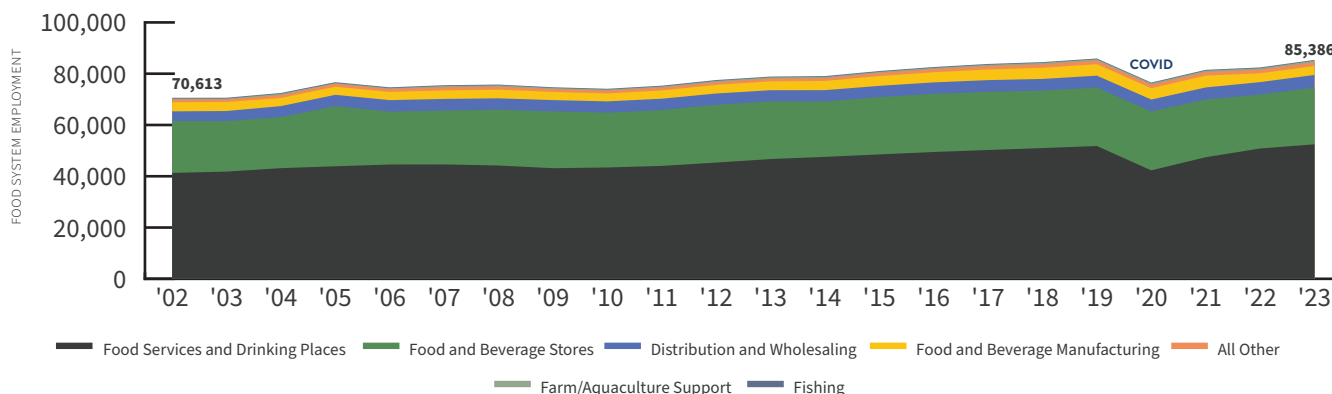
Nationally, both self-employed and hired farmworker labor declined 66% between 1950 and 1990, but has stabilized since 1990. In 2022, 813 farms in New Hampshire reported 4,627 hired farmworkers. The total number of farms in the state declined from 4,123 to 3,949 between 2017 and 2022, still higher than the 3,363 farms reported in 2002.

Farming, fishing, and forestry employers had 258 H-2A seasonal foreign agricultural workers approved by the federal government for employment at New Hampshire worksites in 2024, with a reported wage rate of \$16-\$18 per hour at all sites.

About 70.4% of farms reported a net loss in cash income in 2022; this percentage increased from 68.4% in 2017. About 39.6% of all farms had net cash losses of \$10,000 or more, while only 17.9% had gains of \$10,000 or more.

Local products are not sufficiently valued in the marketplace for most farming operations to earn a profit and compete with national-level sellers. Restricted farm financial resources may result in difficulty hiring, due to offering low wages for difficult work, and competition from other employment opportunities. Across all sectors, New Hampshire has averaged more than two job openings per unemployed worker since the start of 2022.

NEW HAMPSHIRE FOOD SYSTEM EMPLOYMENT, 2002-2023



Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics *Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages* and U.S. Census Bureau *Nonemployer Statistics*.

Challenges and Opportunities

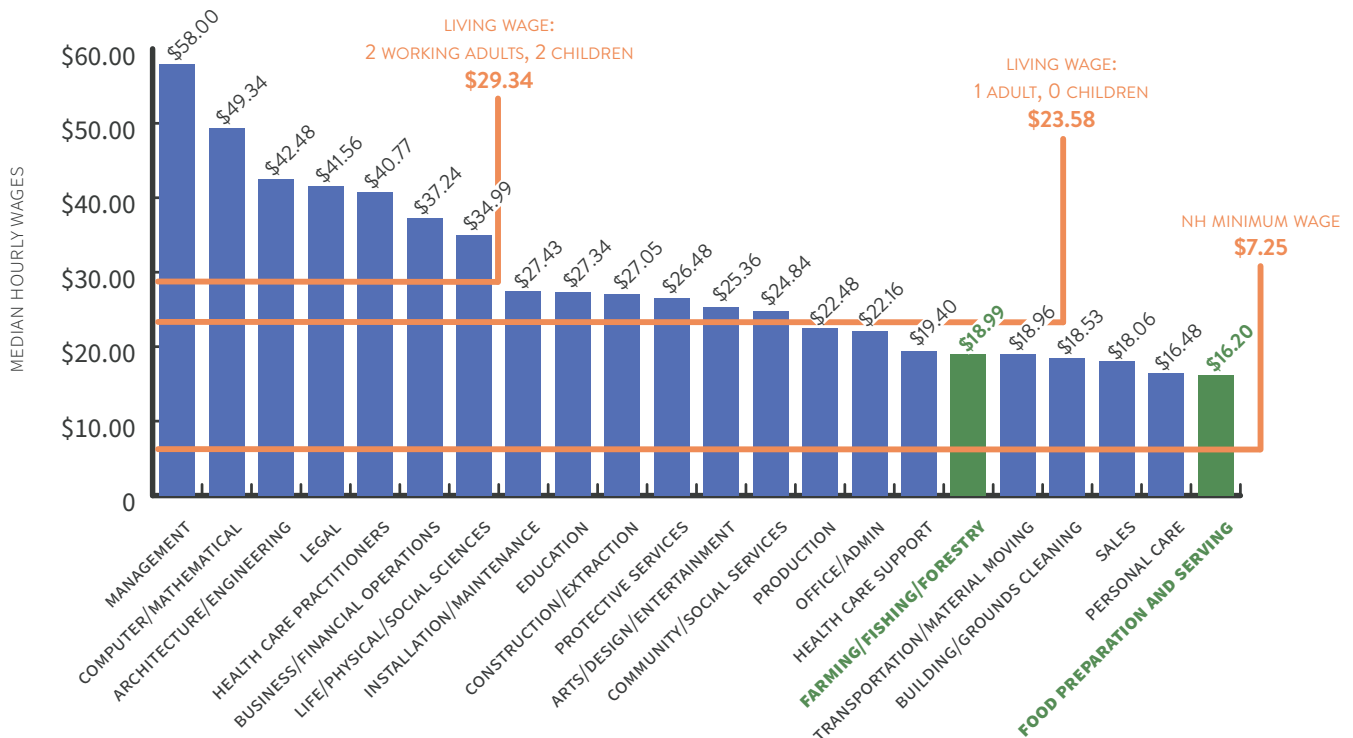
CHALLENGES

- New Hampshire living costs are relatively high, particularly housing and land costs. The MIT Living Wage Calculator estimated that a 2024 living wage in New Hampshire for two adults with one child is \$97,876. Only 292 farms in the state reported a net cash income from operations exceeding \$50,000 in 2022. Housing costs have increased fastest in rural parts of the state, challenging workers seeking affordable housing and aspiring farmers looking to buy and build on land.
- The seasonal nature of work and lack of employer-sponsored healthcare and other benefits limit the viability of agricultural employment.
- Nationally, farmers who are queer and young farmers who identify as a member of a racial or ethnic minority group are more likely to report facing discrimination.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Existing public and nonprofit resources for farmers and workers may be underutilized. Connecting workers with resources they may be eligible for, but are not yet accessing, could enhance health and safety.
- More collaboration between the NH Department of Agriculture, Markets, and Food, other state agencies, businesses, and nonprofits may help generate more markets and higher market value for locally-produced food.
- Clarifying regulations could help reduce instances of agricultural worker discrimination as New Hampshire diversifies.

MEDIAN HOURLY WAGES FOR MAJOR NH OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORIES, 2023



SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2023 State Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, Living Wage Calculator, New Hampshire.

Recommendations

- **Explore opportunities to enable land to be used by farmers without requiring ownership.** Build incentives for current landowners to permit leasing, renting, or other simplified, standardized legal agreements for agricultural work to enable more land to be used by farmers.
- **Support communities to find solutions at the intersection of agriculture and housing.** Investigate whether zoning regulations and conservation easements could have roles in permitting more housing units on agriculture parcels, including model ordinances. Help rural communities understand intersections between agriculture and housing and find local solutions related to accessory dwelling units, mobile or modular housing, and renting.
- **Facilitate cross-sector collaboration to connect seasonal agricultural workers with off-season employment.** Connect employers from different sectors and seasonal agricultural workers with employment outside of food production seasons, providing pathways to year-round income and benefits.
- **Address the underutilization of public programs and establish public benefit navigation services for farmers and workers.** Assess causes of underutilization within existing programs that serve farmers and food producers. Establish public benefit navigation services to enhance the viability of farming, hire more workers, and improve worker quality-of-life.
- **Collaborate to generate higher value for New Hampshire food products in the marketplace.** Enhance marketing and technical assistance collaboration between the NH Department of Agriculture, Markets, and Food and other state agencies, local governments, schools, businesses, nonprofits, and food producers.
- **Protect farm workers and reduce barriers to worker benefits.** Define key terms in regulation, including “intern,” and reduce barriers to worker benefits through law changes. Specifically welcome communities that experience marginalization to agricultural work .

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For more information, including references and opportunities to get involved, visit the 2025 NH Food and Agriculture Strategic Plan web page on nhfoodalliance.org or scan the QR code on the inside front cover of the print version.