# NEBRASKA WORKFORCE TRENDS

SUMMER 2026 ISSUE | NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

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## Nebraskans Encouraged to Stay Vigilant When Hiring Contractors

The Nebraska Department of Labor (NDOL) is urging Nebraskans to use extra caution when hiring contractors for home or business repairs and remodeling. While all contractors working in the state are required to register with NDOL, registration doesn't guarantee the quality of their work.

"Most contractors in our state follow the rules, but it's important to stay cautious as we go through the spring and summer months when contractor activity increases," said Commissioner of Labor Katie Thurber.

### NDOL recommends the following:

- Verify registration. All contractors must be registered with NDOL before performing work in Nebraska. You can search the state's contractor registry at **dol.nebraska.gov/conreg/Search**.
- Check local requirements. State registration does not replace local licensing or building permit rules. Make sure your contractor meets all city or county requirements.
- Be wary of unsolicited offers. Use caution if someone shows up at your door or calls unexpectedly offering a "great deal."
- Ask for references. Speak with past customers to confirm the contractor's reliability and quality of work.
- Get everything in writing. Request written estimates, a detailed contract, proof of insurance, and a written warranty before work begins.
- Avoid large upfront payments. Be suspicious of anyone demanding full or significant payment before starting the job.

For more information, visit the Nebraska Department of Labor's website at **dol.nebraska.gov/LaborStandards** or call 402-471-2239.

# Labor Availability Study Results on Commuting and Working From Home

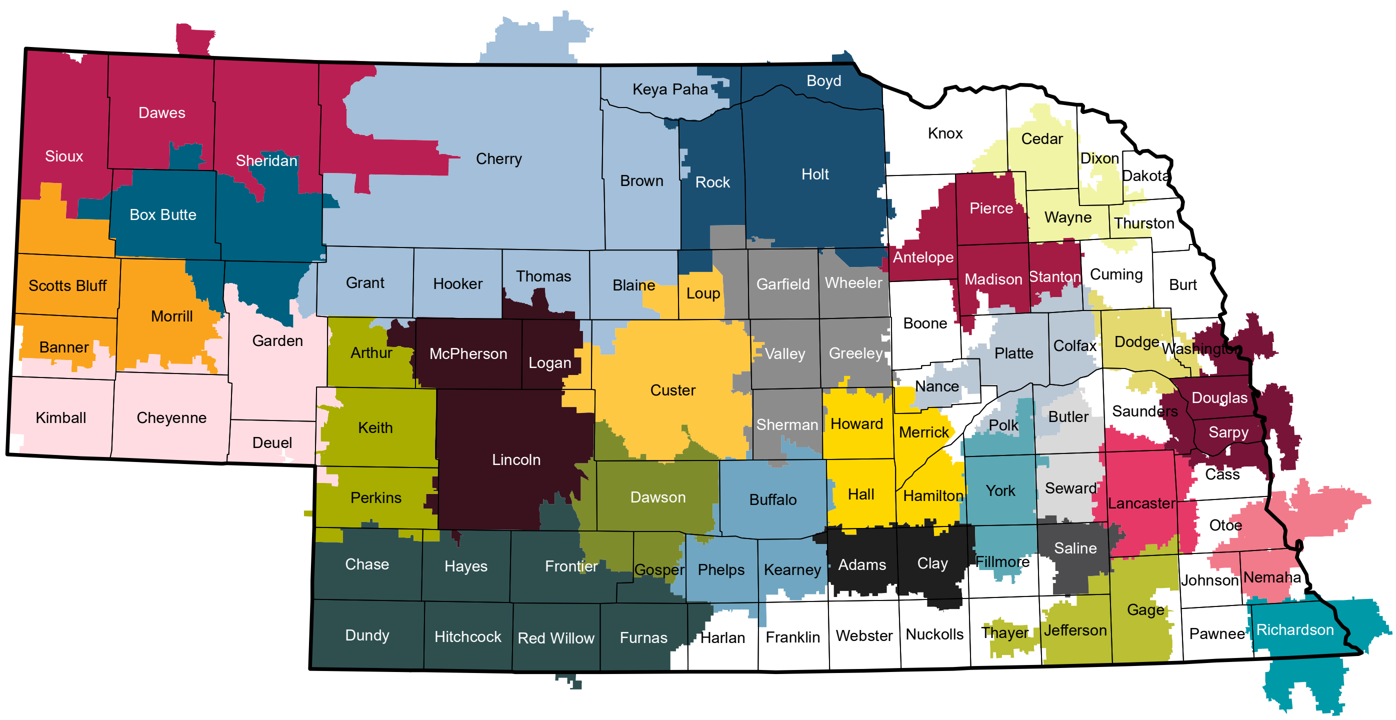
Scott Ferguson, Research Analyst

Since 2014, NDOL's Labor Availability Study (LAS) has been surveying businesses and households in communities throughout the state to gain insight into employer needs, labor availability, and potential skills gaps that may affect Nebraska's labor markets and economy.

This set of results focuses on workers' responses to questions about commuting and working from home. The data below combines the results of more than 7,000 respondents from surveys conducted between 2021 and 2023 across Nebraska, detailed on the map below.

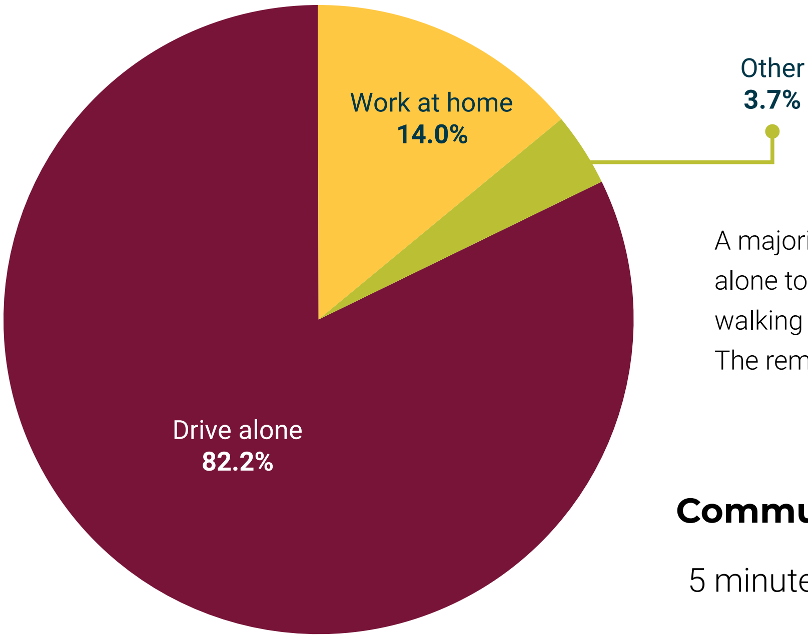
The Labor Availability Study highlights how commuting patterns and working from home shape the experiences of Nebraska workers. Commute length and transportation options influence job satisfaction and mobility, with longer or less convenient commutes often presenting challenges. Access to work from home varies by occupation and role, offering flexibility for some while remaining limited for others. Overall, the findings emphasize the importance of transportation, commute considerations, and work-from-home opportunities in supporting a satisfied and advancing workforce.

## 2021 – 2023 LAS Survey Areas




### LAS Survey Areas

- Alliance (2023)
- Beatrice/Fairbury (2021)
- Broken Bow (2023)
- Chadron (2023)
- Columbus (2022)
- Crete (2022)
- Falls City (2021)
- Fremont (2022)
- Grand Island (2023)
- Greater Lincoln (2022)
- Greater Omaha (2021-2022)
- Hastings (2023)
- Kearney (2023)
- Lexington (2023)
- McCook (2023)
- Nebraska City (2021)
- Norfolk (2022)
- North Platte (2023)
- O'Neill (2023)
- Ogallala (2023)
- Ord (2023)
- Scottsbluff (2023)
- Seward (2022)
- Sidney (2023)
- Valentine (2023)
- Wayne (2022)
- York (2022)

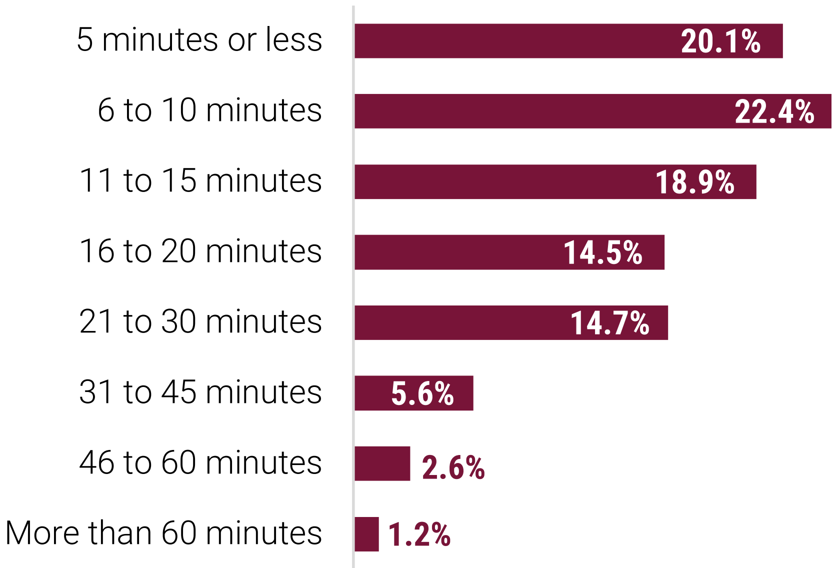



A majority of respondents indicated that they usually drive alone to work (82.2%). Less than 4% listed carpooling (1.6%), walking (1.5%), biking (0.5%), or public transportation (0.1%). The remaining 14% said they typically work at home.

## Commute Time to Work

Among employed respondents, 61.4% said their one-way commute to work was 15 minutes or less. More than one-third (34.5%) reported a commute of 16 to 45 minutes, while just 3.8% reported a commute of more than 45 minutes.

**Commute Time to Work**

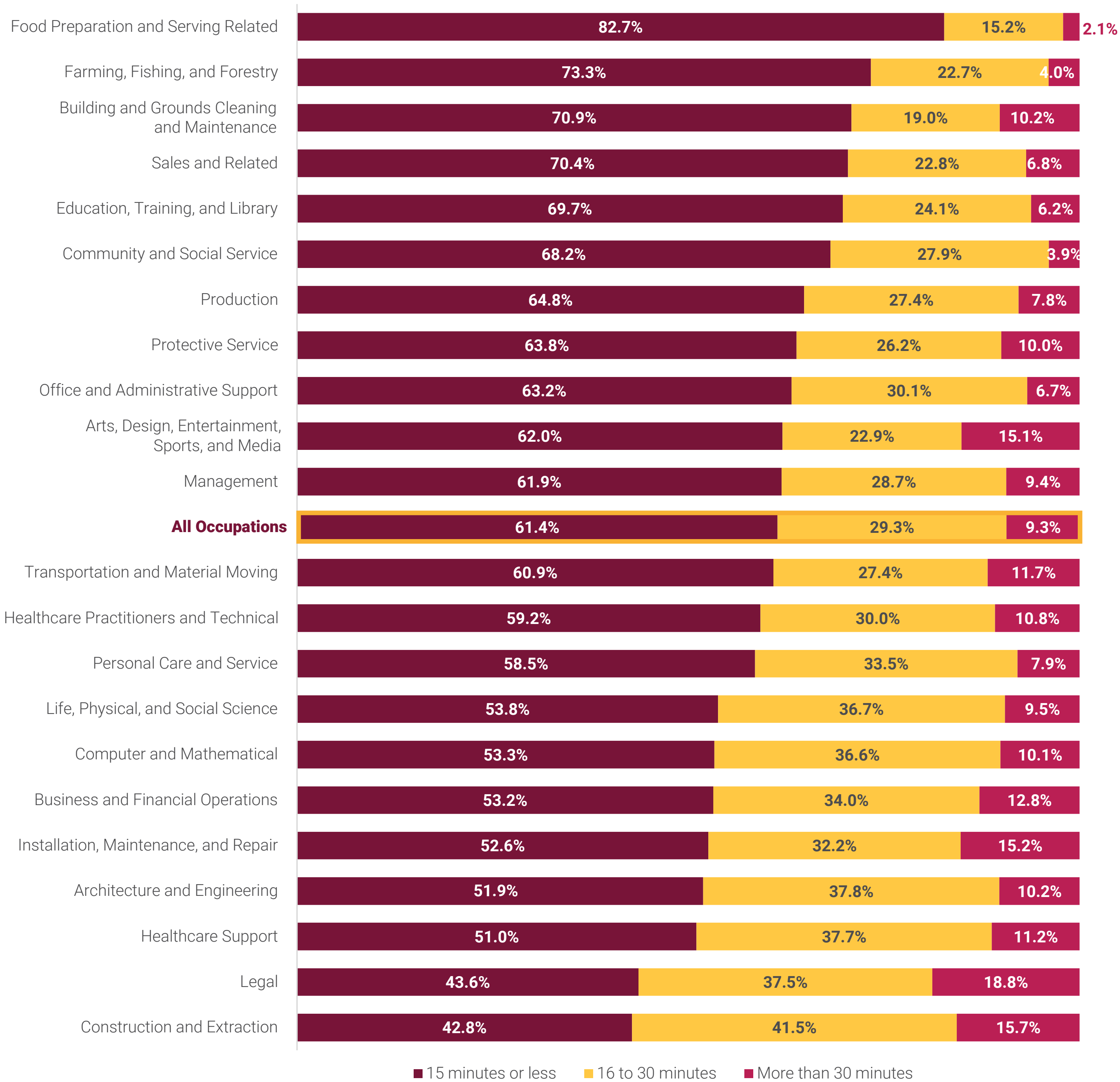



## Commute Time by Occupation Group

Commute time varies significantly across occupational categories. Workers in higher-wage, in-demand occupations such as legal, healthcare-related, architecture and engineering tended to report longer commute times, reflecting the concentration of these jobs in larger population centers and the willingness of higher-wage workers to travel further for specialized employment opportunities. Workers in construction and extraction and installation, maintenance, and repair occupations also reported longer commute times generally due to more project-based, remote worksites.

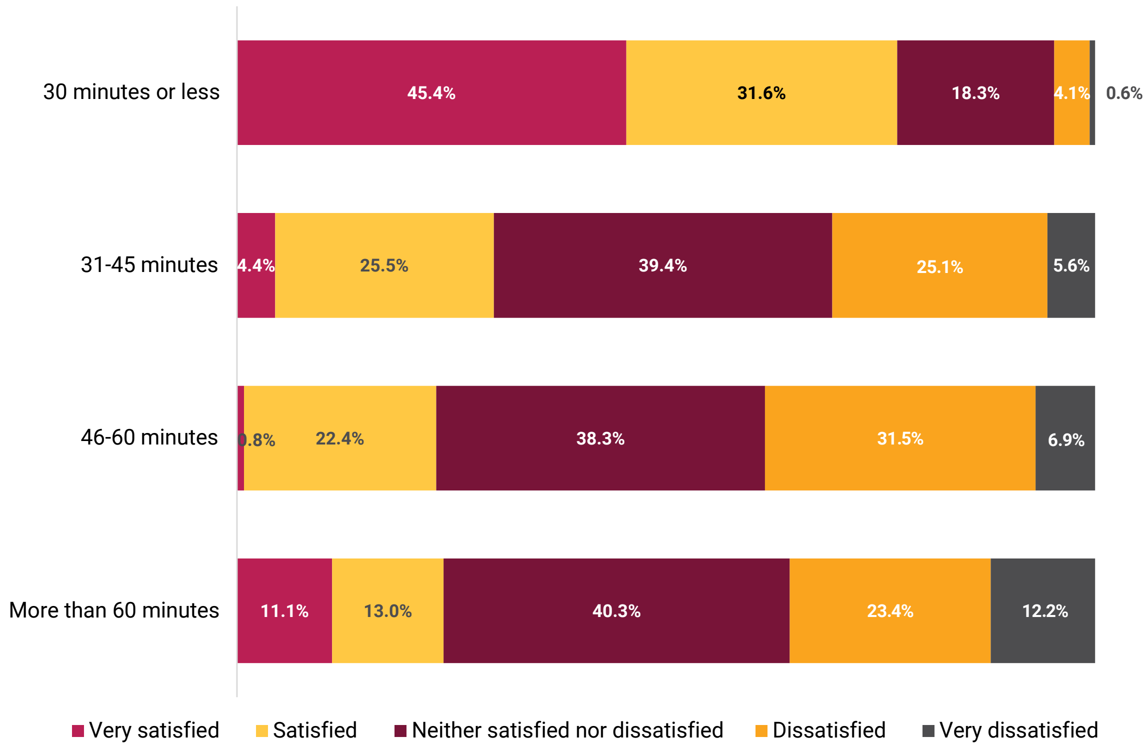
Workers with food preparation and serving related; farming, fishing, and forestry; and building and grounds cleaning and maintenance occupations reported the shortest commutes.

### Commute Time By Occupation Group (Excluding Work From Home)



Commute time satisfaction was highest among those who reported a commute of 30 minutes or less (77%). Dissatisfaction with commuting time increased significantly for longer commutes, from just 4.7% for a commute of 30 minutes or less, to over 30% for longer trips.

## Satisfaction with Commute, by Current Commute Time




Survey participants were asked to indicate the maximum one-way commute time they might accept when considering new job opportunities. Of those with current commute times of 30 minutes or less, 33.7% said they would consider longer commutes. Those with commutes between 31-45 minutes were similarly willing to consider adding time (39.3%).

## Maximum Commute Time

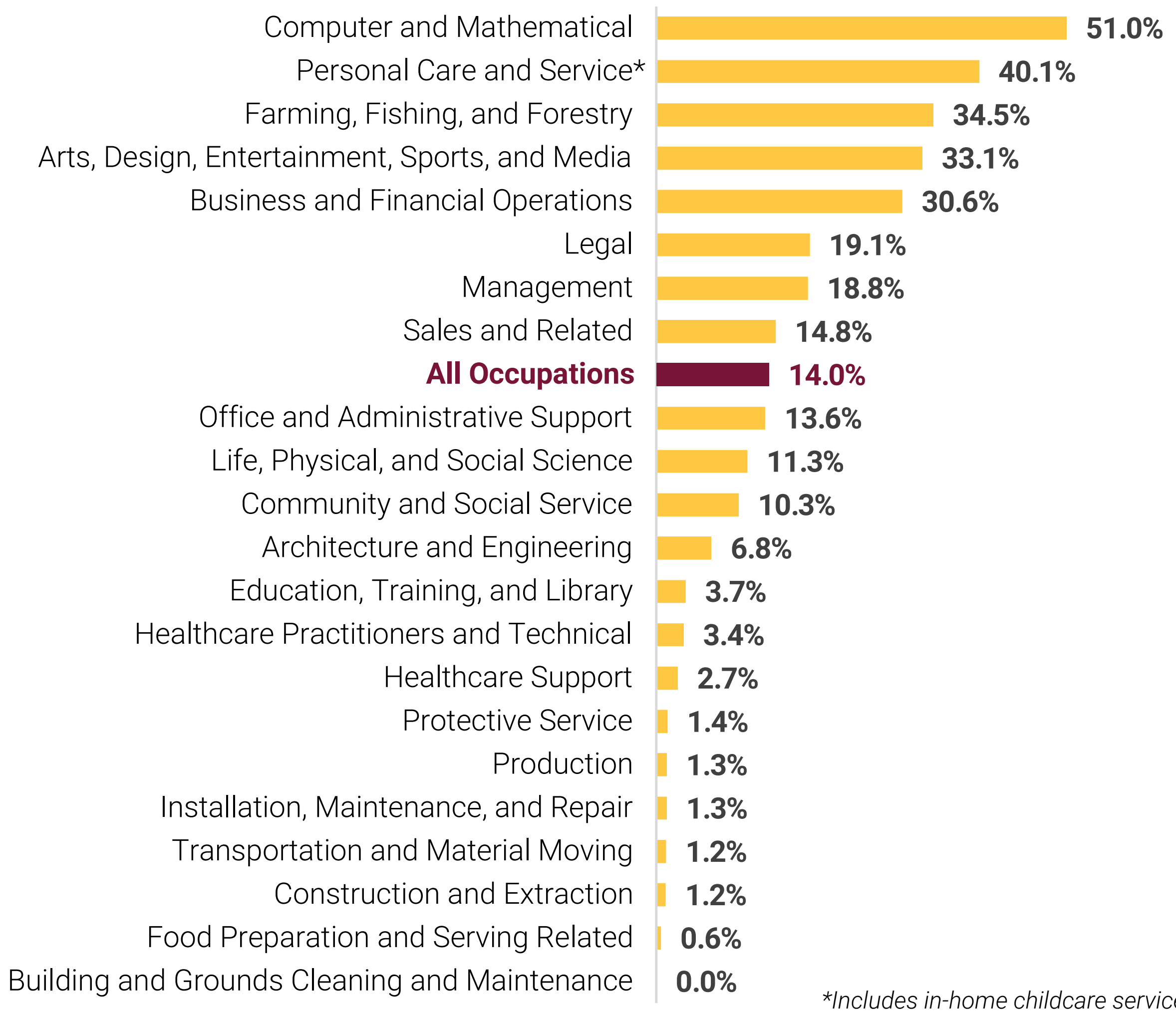
| Current Commute Time | 30 minutes or less | 31-45 minutes | 46-60 minutes | More than 60 minutes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 30 minutes or less | 66.2% | 20.0% | 11.8% | 1.9% |
| 31-45 minutes | 9.0% | 51.7% | 35.4% | 3.9% |
| 46-60 minutes | 11.3% | 3.8% | 59.0% | 26.0% |
| More than 60 minutes | 20.9% | 0.0% | 7.4% | 71.8% |

Respondents whose current commute was more than 60 minutes were generally willing to consider similar commute times for future employment, however 28.3% said they would only consider shorter commutes.

## Working from Home

Home-based work covers a variety of scenarios, such as self-employed sales agents maintaining home offices, living on a farm, or employees performing telework as an alternative to the office.

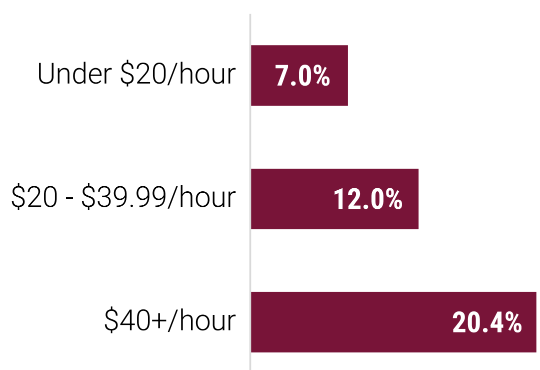
**Percentage of Respondents Reporting Working From Home, by Occupation Group**




*Includes in-home childcare services

**Percentage of Respondents Reporting Working From Home, by Wage**

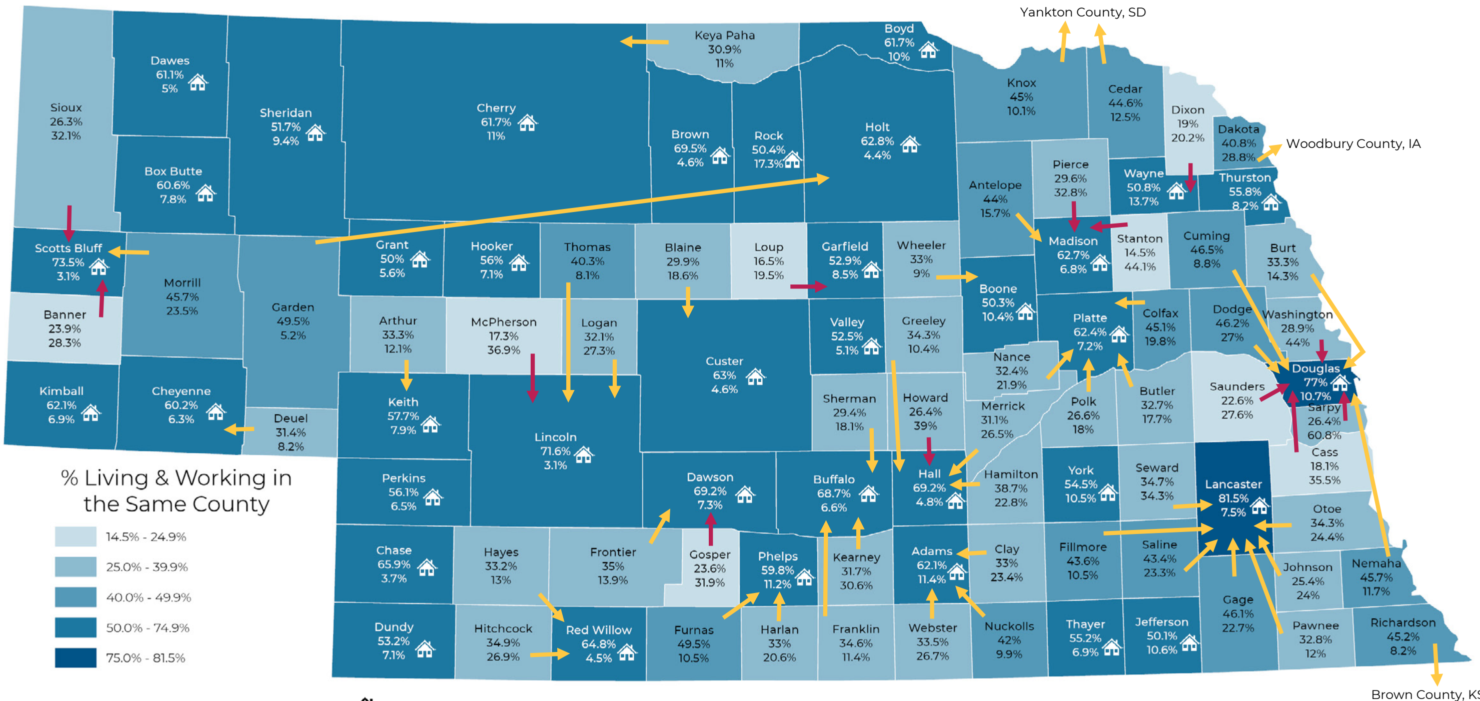
Among respondents earning under $20 per hour, only 7% reported working from home. That figure rose to 12% for those earning between $20 and $39.99 per hour, and jumped to 20.4% for respondents making $40 or more per hour.



# Map Facts: **Commuting Patterns by County**

Jodie Meyer, Research Analyst

## Nebraska Commuting Patterns by County, 2022




≥50% of workers lived and worked in home county.

Where <50% of workers lived and worked in home county, but more workers worked in their home county than any other county, yellow arrow indicates the #2 county where workers living in the home county were employed.

Where more workers worked outside of their home county than inside of their home county, pink arrow indicates the #1 county where workers living in the home county were employed.

*Example: Among employed residents of Sioux County, 26.3% worked inside Sioux County, while 32.1% commuted to Scotts Bluff County for work.*

This month's map examines commuting patterns between counties in Nebraska. This data comes from the U.S. Census Bureau's Local Employment Dynamics (LED) program. Using the data from the Destination Analysis reports from the OnTheMap application, we can tell where people who lived in a specific area worked in 2022. The base map is color-coded based on the percentage of workers living and working in the same county. The percentages written within each county show, respectively, the share of residents who worked inside their home county, and the share who worked in the external county that accounted for the largest portion of the home county's employment. The symbols and arrows were then added based on three main patterns that emerged in the data. In 37 out of Nebraska's 93 counties, the majority (50% or more) of workers both lived and worked in the same county. These are marked on the map with a house symbol, indicating that most employed residents worked in the same county in which they lived. The top three places where the largest shares of workers lived and worked in the same county were Lancaster (81.5%), Douglas (77.0%), and Scotts Bluff (73.5%) Counties.

In another 43 of Nebraska's counties, less than 50% of working residents stayed in that county for work, but the home county nevertheless employed more of its residents than any other county. For counties falling into this category, the map's yellow arrows point to the external county where the greatest percentage of workers employed outside their home county traveled for work. The second percentage listed in the county indicates the percentage of workers commuting to this neighboring county. Finally, there were 13 Nebraska counties where more residents traveled to another county for work than were employed locally. These are identified on the map by a pink arrow pointing to the county that employed the largest share of the home county's residents. This phenomenon was most pronounced in Stanton County, with just 14.5% of workers living and working in Stanton County, and 44.1% of workers traveling to Madison County for work.


**Source:**

1. U. S. Census Bureau. OnTheMap Application. Longitudinal-Employer Household Dynamics Program. [Online] 2022. https://onthemap.ces.census.gov/.

# Occupational Profile: **Welders**

Darci Anderson, Research Analyst

Welding is defined by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics as using hand welding, flame cutting, hand soldering or brazing equipment to weld or join metal components or to fill holes, indentations, or seams of fabricated metal products. (1)

## What They Do:

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), typical duties for welders include (1)

- Melt metal, plastic, or other materials to prepare for production
- Operate grinding equipment
- Operate Metal or plastic forming equipment
- Review blueprints or other instructions to determine operational methods or sequences

## Nebraska Employment and Wages by Top Industries of Employment for Welders

| Industry | Employment (Jan. 2026) | Median Annual Wage (Q1 2026) |
|---|---|---|
| Machinery Manufacturing | **990** | $53,353 |
| Transportation Equipment Manufacturing | **930** | $54,969 |
| Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing | **910** | $53,276 |

*Source: Nebraska Department of Labor, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS). Q1 2026. neworks.nebraska.gov.*

## Educational Requirements:

A high school diploma or equivalent is required to become a welder. Trade schools are recommended but not required. Welders are usually trained on the job. On-the job-training can last anywhere from a few months to over a year. Apprenticeships are available for welders. (1)

## Nebraska Wages for Welders:

Entry level: **$21.36**

Average hourly: **$26.58**

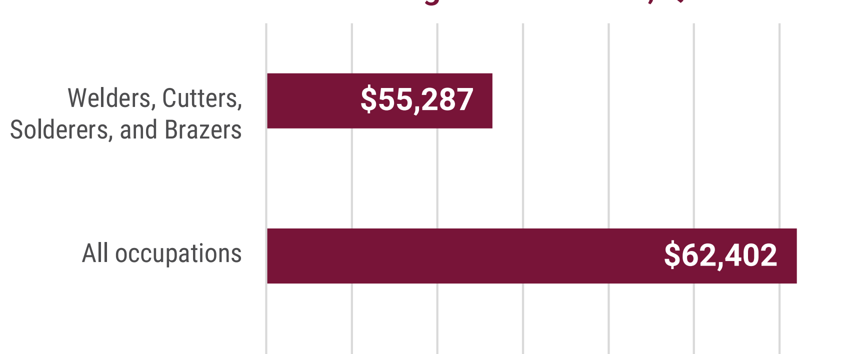
High wage: **$32.16**

## Occupations

- Production
- First-Line Supervisors of Production and Operating Workers
- Engine and Other Machine Assemblers
- Structural Metal Fabricators and Fitters
- Fiberglass Laminators and Fabricators
- Welders, Cutters, Solderers, and Brazers
- Welding, Soldering, and Brazing Machine Setters, Operators, and Tenders
- Heat Treating Equipment Setters, Operators, and Tenders, Metal and Plastic

There were **4,200** welders working in Nebraska, Q1 2026. (2)

## Nebraska Median Annual Wages for Welders, Q1 2026




**Sources:**

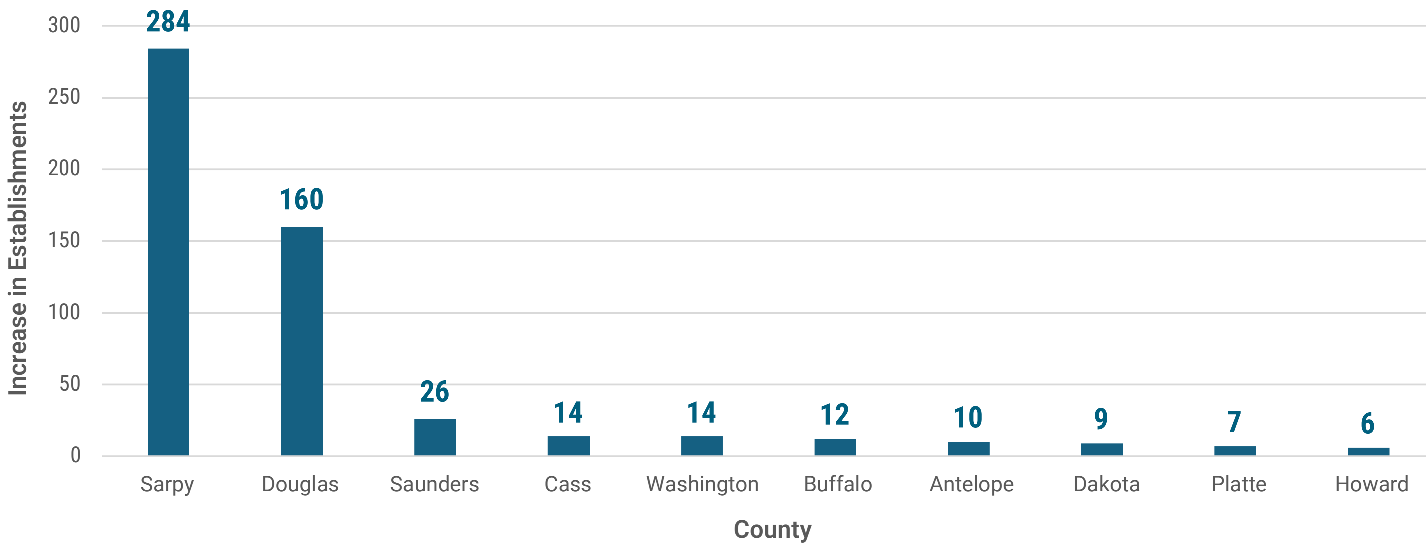
1. *U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. Occupational Information Network (O*NET). 51-4121 – Welders, Cutters, Solderers, and Brazers. [Online] 2025. https://www.onetonline.org/link/summary/51-4041.00.*
2. *Nebraska Department of Labor. Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics. [Online] Q1 2026. neworks.nebraska.gov.*

# County Changes by Establishments, Employment, and Average Weekly Wages (Q3 2024 – Q3 2025)

Brandon Jones, Research Supervisor

The over-year change in establishments, employment, and average weekly wages across counties in Nebraska can offer a comprehensive view of local economic conditions. While statewide trends point to overall stability, the data can reveal meaningful differences at the county level, with employment growth concentrated in larger metro areas and more variability observed in smaller, rural counties. By capturing these local dynamics, the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) can help provide valuable insight into how economic activity, job opportunities, and earnings are evolving across Nebraska's diverse regional economies.

## Top Nebraska Counties by Establishment Growth



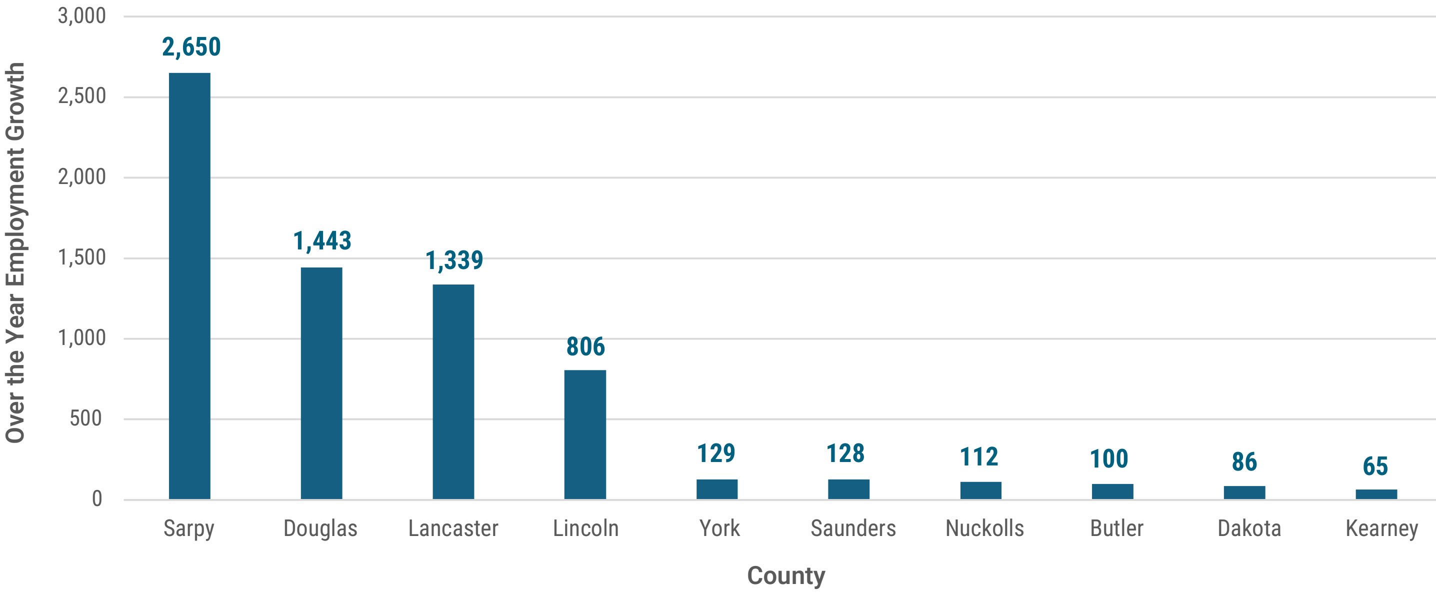

## Establishments: Growth Concentrated in Metro Counties

The chart displays the year-over-year change in business establishments, highlighting counties with net gains in establishments, while the accompanying table identifies counties that experienced a net decline. Growth and employment gains were largely concentrated in metro counties with some exceptions, while many rural areas experienced modest declines or greater volatility. Sarpy, Douglas, and Saunders counties led establishment growth over the year. Rural counties experienced more modest gains or declines with the exception of Lancaster County. Adams, Keith and Lancaster saw the largest number drop in establishments but looking deeper at the percentage change, Dawes, Clay, and Keith counties saw the largest decline compared to their total amount of establishments. Lancaster on the other hand lost less than a quarter of one percent.

**Nebraska Counties with the Largest Decrease in Establishments (2024 Q3-2025 Q3)**

| County Name | Year-to-Year Change | Percent Change |
|---|---|---|
| Adams | -29 | -2.77% |
| Keith | -23 | -5.74% |
| Lancaster | -22 | -0.22% |
| Dawes | -19 | -6.31% |
| Clay | -17 | -6.12% |
| Custer | -16 | -3.29% |
| Gage | -16 | -2.17% |
| Madison | -16 | -1.20% |
| Scotts Bluff | -16 | -1.34% |
| Cheyenne | -14 | -4.01% |

## Top Nebraska Counties by Employment Year-Over-Year Growth




## Employment: Diverging Trends Across Counties

Sarpy County led the state in employment growth, followed by Douglas and Lancaster counties. With its strong gains in establishments and employment growth at roughly twice the pace of Douglas and Lancaster, this data has shown that Sarpy County is Nebraska's fastest growing and most dynamic area.

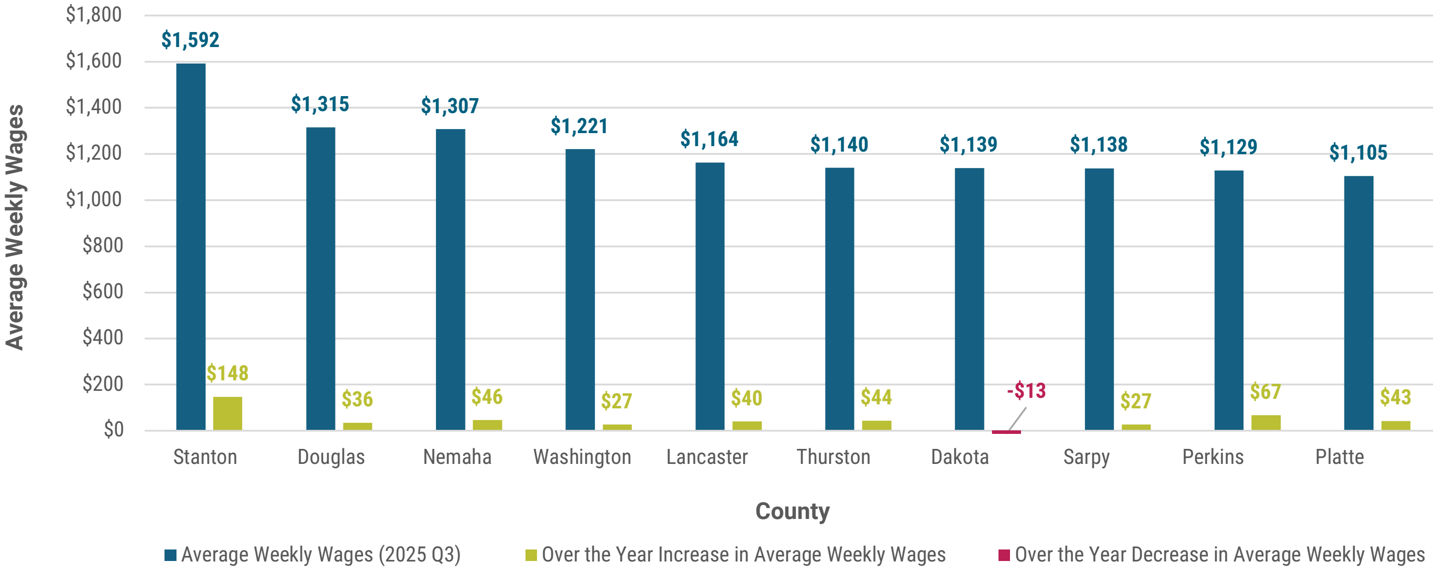
Several counties, particularly in rural areas, experienced employment declines. Adams, Hall, and Thurston counties saw the largest losses in employment. While Hall and Platte counties posted notable drops in employment, these declines represent only a small share of their total employment levels. In contrast, Dixon County experienced a much sharper contraction, with employment falling by nearly 14 percent.

**Nebraska Counties with the Largest Decrease in Employment (2024 Q3-2025 Q3)**

| County | Employment Change | Over the Year Percentage Change |
|---|---|---|
| Adams | **-525** | **-3.28%** |
| Hall | **-336** | **-0.93%** |
| Thurston | **-321** | **-8.86%** |
| Platte | **-302** | **-1.51%** |
| Dawson | **-293** | **-2.47%** |
| Buffalo | **-266** | **-0.94%** |
| Dixon | **-261** | **-13.62%** |
| Colfax | **-229** | **-4.46%** |
| Madison | **-207** | **-0.93%** |
| Saline | **-202** | **-3.02%** |

These trends highlight the growing divide between rapidly-expanding metro areas and more vulnerable rural economies. Understanding where growth and decline are occurring helps guide workforce development, economic planning, and targeted policy decisions across Nebraska's 93 counties.

## Top Nebraska Counties by Highest Average Weekly Wage




## Average Weekly Wage: Variation Across Counties

Average weekly wages varied across counties, reflecting differences in industry mix and job quality. Stanton, Douglas, and Nemaha counties reported the highest average weekly wages, with Stanton also leading the state in over-the-year wage growth.

At the other end of the spectrum, Hooker, Keya Paha, and Loup counties recorded the lowest average weekly wages. These lower wage levels are often tied to smaller labor markets and a higher concentration of lower paying industries.

**Nebraska Counties by Lowest Average Weekly Wage**

| County | Average Weekly Wages 2025 Q3 | Over-the-Year Change in Average Weekly Wages | Percent Change |
|---|---|---|---|
| Hooker | **$625** | **-54** | **-7.95%** |
| Keya Paha | **$662** | **-14** | **-2.07%** |
| Loup | **$710** | **29** | **4.26%** |
| Grant | **$730** | **5** | **0.69%** |
| Boyd | **$731** | **38** | **5.48%** |
| Arthur | **$737** | **69** | **10.33%** |
| Garfield | **$760** | **-46** | **-5.71%** |
| Hayes | **$776** | **14** | **1.84%** |
| Sherman | **$778** | **20** | **2.64%** |
| Sioux | **$784** | **29** | **3.84%** |

These wage patterns highlight disparities in earning potential across Nebraska and underscore the role industry composition plays in shaping local economies. Understanding these differences helps inform workforce strategies aimed at improving job quality and supporting higher-wage opportunities statewide.

## Final Thoughts

Nebraska's economy remains stable overall, but underlying trends vary across counties, highlighting differences in local economic conditions and growth patterns. These variations underscore the importance of looking beyond statewide totals to better understand how communities are experiencing change.

If you would like to explore QCEW data for yourself, check it out at the website, **NEworks.nebraska.gov/qcew**

This analysis represents only a small portion of what QCEW data can offer. Additional insights can be gained through regional rollups, detailed industry level analysis, and breakouts by private and public sector employment, providing a more complete view of economic activity across the state.

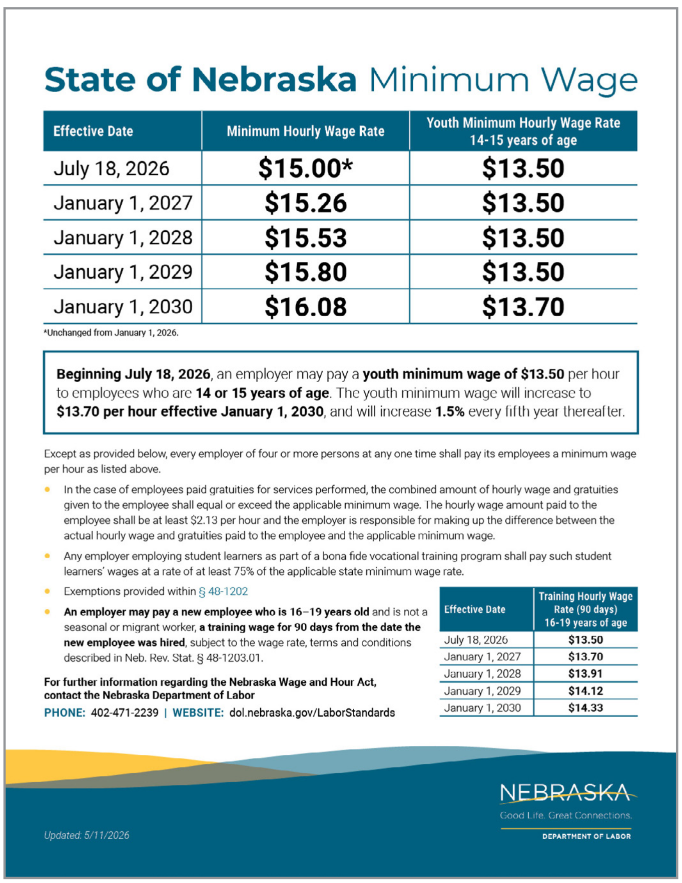
# Nebraska Promotes **Registered Apprenticeships** for **In-Demand Careers**

Delta Wilson, Program Coordinator

A Registered Apprenticeship Program is a paid, structured training program in which a worker spends time both on the job and in the classroom learning the skills and theory necessary to excel in their occupation. Traditionally embraced by the construction and trades industries, Registered Apprenticeship Programs exist in practically every industry. From teachers and nurses to bankers and engineers, there is a Registered Apprenticeship Opportunity for any business or organization seeking to strengthen its talent pool.

In Nebraska, we have embraced Registered Apprenticeship as a successful long-term career pathway for youth entering the workforce for the first time, adults changing careers/industries due to technological advances, and current employees ready to take the next step in their career. Thanks to the “Good Life, Great Careers” initiative, we are more motivated than ever to support Registered Apprenticeship Programs and meet Governor Pillen’s goals of 6,000 new apprentices in Nebraska by 2030.

Employers, industry and professional associations, economic development groups, non-profits, and educational providers are invited to learn more about Registered Apprenticeship Programs and attend events and proclamations being held statewide during National Apprenticeship Week. Visit dol.nebraska.gov learn more about starting your own Registered Apprenticeship Program.



**State of Nebraska** Minimum Wage

| Effective Date | Minimum Hourly Wage Rate | Youth Minimum Hourly Wage Rate 14-15 years of age |
|---|---|---|
| July 18, 2026 | **$15.00*** | **$13.50** |
| January 1, 2027 | **$15.26** | **$13.50** |
| January 1, 2028 | **$15.53** | **$13.50** |
| January 1, 2029 | **$15.80** | **$13.50** |
| January 1, 2030 | **$16.08** | **$13.70** |

*Unchanged from January 1, 2026.

**Beginning July 18, 2026**, an employer may pay a **youth minimum wage of $13.50** per hour to employees who are **14 or 15 years of age**. The youth minimum wage will increase to **$13.70 per hour effective January 1, 2030**, and will increase **1.5%** every fifth year thereafter.

Except as provided below, every employer of four or more persons at any one time shall pay its employees a minimum wage per hour as listed above.

- In the case of employees paid gratuities for services performed, the combined amount of hourly wage and gratuities given to the employee shall equal or exceed the applicable minimum wage. The hourly wage amount paid to the employee shall be at least $2.13 per hour and the employer is responsible for making up the difference between the actual hourly wage and gratuities paid to the employee and the applicable minimum wage.
- Any employer employing student learners as part of a bona fide vocational training program shall pay such student learners’ wages at a rate of at least 75% of the applicable state minimum wage rate.
- Exemptions provided within § 48-1202
- **An employer may pay a new employee who is 16–19 years old** and is not a seasonal or migrant worker, **a training wage for 90 days from the date the new employee was hired**, subject to the wage rate, terms and conditions described in Neb. Rev. Stat. § 48-1203.01.

| Effective Date | Training Hourly Wage Rate (90 days) 16-19 years of age |
|---|---|
| July 18, 2026 | **$13.50** |
| January 1, 2027 | **$13.70** |
| January 1, 2028 | **$13.91** |
| January 1, 2029 | **$14.12** |
| January 1, 2030 | **$14.33** |

**For further information regarding the Nebraska Wage and Hour Act, contact the Nebraska Department of Labor**

**PHONE:** 402-471-2239 | **WEBSITE:** dol.nebraska.gov/LaborStandards

*Updated: 5/11/2026*

NEBRASKA
Good Life. Great Connections.
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

# Nebraska Minimum Wage Update – 2026

Effective July 18, 2026, Nebraska’s standard minimum wage remains $15.00 per hour for most adult workers. However, new legislation introduces a reduced minimum wage of $13.50 per hour for employees aged 14–15. This $13.50 rate also applies as a 90-day training wage for newly hired employees aged 16–19.

## Key points:

- **Standard Minimum Wage:** $15.00 per hour for adult workers.
- **Tipped Employees:** Minimum cash wage is $2.13 per hour, with tips required to bring total pay to at least $15.00 per hour.
- **Youth/Training Wage:** $13.50 per hour for workers 14–15, and as a 90-day training wage for new hires 16–19.

Additional rules and exemptions may apply. Information about the minimum wage, including the current workplace poster (shown at right), is available at **dol.nebraska.gov/LaborStandards**. Labor law specialists are available to answer questions from workers and employers regarding wages in Nebraska and may be contacted at 402-471-2239 or **ndol.laborstdrdsinquiries@nebraska.gov**.

*Labor market information is updated continuously. For the latest data, visit **neworks.nebraska.gov** or contact us at 800-876-1377 or email **NDOL.LMI_NE@nebraska.gov**.*