



Missouri Economy Indicators

Agribusiness Workforce Needs

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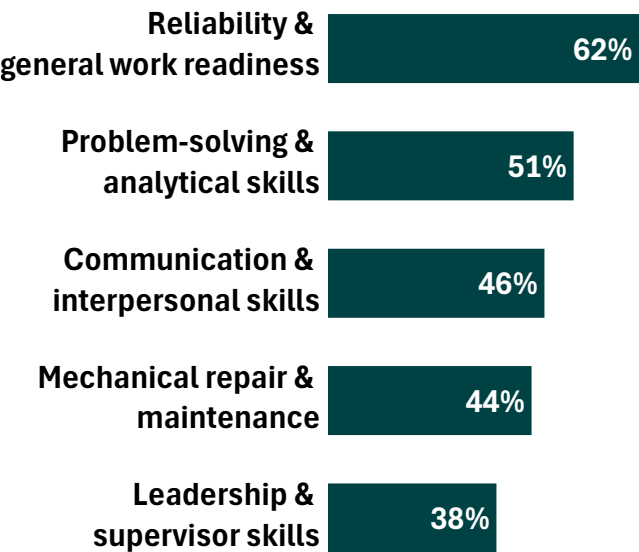
Agricultural production, processing, and related industries are a cornerstone of the Midwest economy, particularly in rural communities. Collectively known as “agribusiness,” these segments account for one in 10 private-sector jobs in Missouri’s nonmetropolitan counties. While agribusiness drives regional wealth, employers face significant workforce challenges that limit growth. In a [recent analysis](#) of businesses across eight Midwest states, including Missouri, 75% identified a **shortage of skilled workers** as the primary barrier to expanding employment. Another 39% cited unfavorable economic conditions as a barrier. As global demand for food production and processing continues to rise, equipping the next generation with the skills needed for careers in agribusiness is essential to sustaining and advancing this vital economic sector.

Foundational Skills Are a Top Concern

Most Midwest agribusinesses surveyed (62%) noted difficulty finding workers who are reliable and ready to work. Around half said that problem-solving (51%) and communication (46%) skills were hard to find. Together, these foundational competencies emerged as the top concern for agribusiness employers—a trend consistently reflected in broader workforce surveys.

Nearly half of agribusiness employers (44%) also reported difficulty finding workers with mechanical repair and maintenance skills. Given that many agribusiness jobs are concentrated in manufacturing and farm work, the demand for skilled labor to maintain and operate equipment is not surprising.

Job Skills Most Difficult to Find, According to Agribusiness Employers



Source: MU Extension graphic using 2024 Midwest agribusiness workforce needs assessment survey.

Entry-Level Agribusiness Jobs Come with Challenges

Agribusinesses employ a larger share of entry-level workers (47%) than the overall private sector (41%), creating opportunities for younger individuals without formal post-secondary education. Midwest agricultural producers said farm labor (42%) and truck drivers (16%) were the hardest entry-level positions to fill. Among agriculture-related manufacturers, 46% said that production labor positions were the most difficult to hire for. Although these entry-level positions are accessible to job seekers with limited experience, 57% of agribusinesses said the physical demands of the work discourage younger applicants. On a positive note, most manufacturers (53%) said they offer career advancement opportunities that appeal to young workers.

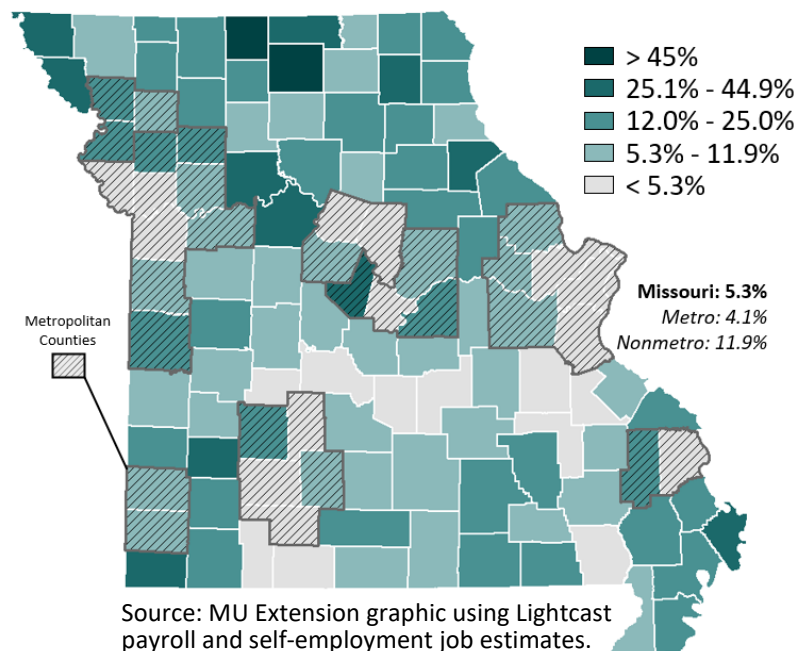
Middle- and High-Skill Agribusiness Jobs Require Managerial and Technical Training

Middle-skill jobs account for 44% of positions in agribusiness, compared to a 32% share across the broader private sector. These jobs typically require moderate-to-long-term training or a technical or associate degree. They often pay well and offer career advancement opportunities without the need for a four-year college degree. High demand middle-skill occupations that pay more than \$50,000 include tractor-trailer truck drivers, wholesale and manufacturing sales representatives, and industrial machinery mechanics. Higher-skill roles, such as operations and industrial production managers, generally require leadership skills and business experience, with salaries typically exceeding \$75,000. These positions are highly sought by agribusinesses but are also in demand across other industries. Specialized occupations, such as veterinarians, are critical to agribusiness but require extensive education before entering the field.

Rural Employment Rooted in Agribusiness

Roughly one in 20 private-sector workers (5.3%) are employed in agribusiness. In Missouri, agribusiness employment is notably higher in nonmetro counties (11.9%) than in metro counties (4.1%). Mercer County leads the state, with more than three-quarters of its private-sector jobs (75.7%) in agribusiness. Sullivan County follows at 59.7%, with Dade, Ralls, and McDonald counties each reporting more than 40% employment in agribusiness. Conversely, Pulaski and Taney counties, both nonmetro, had the lowest shares of agribusiness employment at 1.7%, due to the dominance of the military and tourism, respectively, in their local economies. Nonmetro counties accounted for 28 of the top 30 counties with the highest concentrations of agribusiness employment.

Missouri Agribusiness Jobs as a Share of Private Sector Employment, 2024



Additional Notes and Resources

- The [Midwest Food, Agriculture, and Forestry Workforce Needs Assessment Report](#) provides additional information regarding agribusiness employers and their labor needs. The report is part of a USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture-funded project to promote agribusiness workforce development in collaboration with eight state 4-H Extension programs.

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