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County Employment and Wages in North Carolina – Fourth Quarter 2015

Employment increased in all nine of North Carolina's large counties from December 2014 to December 2015, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported today. (Large counties are defined as those with employment of 75,000 or more as measured by 2014 annual average employment.) Regional Commissioner Janet S. Rankin noted that employment increases ranged from 4.0 percent in Mecklenburg County to 0.7 percent in Cumberland County. (See table 1.)

Nationally, employment advanced 1.9 percent from December 2014 to December 2015 as 308 of the 342 largest U.S. counties registered increases. Williamson, Tenn., recorded the largest rate of increase, up 6.8 percent. Ector, Texas, had the largest over-the-year decrease in employment among the largest U.S. counties, down 11.8 percent.

Among the nine largest counties in North Carolina, employment was highest in Mecklenburg County (658,400) in December 2015, while Catawba County had the smallest employment level (85,300). Together, North Carolina's large counties accounted for 53.8 percent of total employment within the state. Nationwide, the 342 largest counties made up 72.5 percent of total U.S. employment, which stood at 141.9 million in December 2015.

Each of North Carolina's nine large counties posted over-the-year wage increases in December 2015. Durham County had the highest average weekly wage among the state's largest counties ($1,278), followed by Mecklenburg County ($1,204), and Wake County ($1,071). Nationally, the average weekly wage rose 4.4 percent to $1,082 in the fourth quarter of 2015. (See table 1.)

Employment and wage levels (but not over-the-year changes) are also available for the 91 counties in North Carolina with employment below 75,000. With the exception of Orange County ($1,094), wage levels in all of these smaller counties were below the U.S. average in December 2015. (See table 2.)

Large county wage changes

Average weekly wages increased in each of the large counties in North Carolina from the fourth quarter of 2014 to the fourth quarter of 2015. The wage gains in three of the state's large counties placed in the top fourth of the national ranking—Catawba (8.9 percent, 9th), Mecklenburg (6.8 percent, 36th), and Cumberland (6.1 percent, 73rd). (See table 1.)

Nationally, 325 of the 342 largest counties had over-the-year wage increases. Wyandotte, Kan., had the largest wage increase among the largest U.S. counties (10.4 percent). Sonoma, Calif., was second with a wage increase of 10.0 percent, followed by Lake, Ill. (9.8 percent), Passaic, N.J. (9.4 percent), and the counties of Santa Clara, Calif., and Anoka, Minn. (9.3 percent each).

Of the 342 largest counties, 10 experienced over-the-year decreases in average weekly wages. Midland, Texas, had the largest percentage decrease in average weekly wages, with a loss of 11.5 percent. Ector, Texas, had the second largest decrease in average weekly wages (-8.0 percent), followed by Lafayette, La. (-4.3 percent); Gregg, Texas (-3.2 percent); and San Mateo, Calif. (-2.3 percent).

Large county average weekly wages

Durham County ($1,278) and Mecklenburg County ($1,204) had the highest average weekly wages in North Carolina and ranked 40th and 57th, respectively, among the 342 large U.S. counties by wage level. Average weekly wages in the state's remaining seven large counties were below the national average of $1,082 in the fourth quarter of 2015. Cumberland ($814) reported the lowest average weekly wage among the state's large counties and ranked 320th nationwide.

Nationwide, average weekly wages were at or above the U.S. average ($1,082) in 101 of the 342 largest counties in the fourth quarter of 2015. Santa Clara, Calif., recorded the highest average weekly wage at $2,335, followed by New York, N.Y. ($2,235); San Mateo, Calif. ($2,095); San Francisco, Calif. ($1,961); and Suffolk Ma. ($1,943).

Among the largest U.S. counties, 241 had average weekly wages below the national average in the fourth quarter of 2015. Cameron County, Texas ($649), reported the lowest weekly wage, followed by the counties of Horry, S.C. ($653); Hidalgo, Texas ($661); Webb, Texas ($706); and Harrison, Miss. ($729).

Average weekly wages in North Carolina's smaller counties

With the exception of Orange County ($1,094), all of the smaller counties in North Carolina, those with employment below 75,000, had average weekly wages lower than the national average of $1,082. Among these smaller counties, Iredell had the second-highest average weekly wage at $944, while Alleghany had the lowest at $591. (See table 2.)

When all 100 counties in North Carolina were considered, 14 reported average weekly wages below $650, 54 had wages from $650-$749, 23 had wages from $750-$849, and 9 had wages above $850. (See chart 1.)

Additional statistics and other information

QCEW data for states have been included in this release in table 3. For additional information about quarterly employment and wages data, please read the Technical Note or visit www.bls.gov/cew.

Employment and Wages Annual Averages Online features comprehensive information by detailed industry on establishments, employment, and wages for the nation and all states. The 2014 edition of this publication contains selected data produced by Business Employment Dynamics (BED) on job gains and losses, as well as selected data from the first quarter 2015 version of the national news release. Tables and additional content from *Employment and Wages Annual Averages 2014* are now available online at https://www.bls.gov/cew/cewbultn14.htm. The 2015 edition of *Employment and Wages Annual Averages Online* will be available in December 2016.

The County Employment and Wages release for first quarter 2016 is scheduled to be released on Wednesday, September 7, 2016.

Technical Note

Average weekly wage data by county are compiled under the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) program, also known as the ES-202 program. The data are derived from summaries of employment and total pay of workers covered by state and federal unemployment insurance (UI) legislation and provided by State Workforce Agencies (SWAs). The 9.7 million employer reports cover 141.9 million full- and part-time workers. The average weekly wage values are calculated by dividing quarterly total wages by the average of the three monthly employment levels of those covered by UI programs. The result is then divided by 13, the number of weeks in a quarter. It is to be noted, therefore, that over-the-year wage changes for geographic areas may reflect shifts in the composition of employment by industry, occupation, and such other factors as hours of work. Thus, wages may vary among counties, metropolitan areas, or states for reasons other than changes in the average wage level. Data for all states, Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), counties, and the nation are available on the BLS Web site at www.bls.gov/cew/; however, data in QCEW press releases have been revised and may not match the data contained on the Bureau's Web site.

QCEW data are not designed as a time series. QCEW data are simply the sums of individual establishment records reflecting the number of establishments that exist in a county or industry at a point in time. Establishments can move in or out of a county or industry for a number of reasons–some reflecting economic events, others reflecting administrative changes.

The preliminary QCEW data presented in this release may differ from data released by the individual states as well as from the data presented on the BLS Web site. These potential differences result from the states' continuing receipt, review and editing of UI data over time. On the other hand, differences between data in this release and the data found on the BLS Web site are the result of adjustments made to improve over-the-year comparisons. Specifically, these adjustments account for administrative (noneconomic) changes such as a correction to a previously reported location or industry classification. Adjusting for these administrative changes allows users to more accurately assess changes of an economic nature (such as a firm moving from one county to another or changing its primary economic activity) over a 12-month period. Currently, adjusted data are available only from BLS press releases.

Information in this release will be made available to sensory impaired individuals upon request. Voice phone: (202) 691-5200; Federal Relay Service: (800) 877-8339.

Table 1. Covered employment and wages in the United States and the 9 largest counties in North Carolina, fourth quarter 2015

Area	Employment			Average weekly wage [1]			
	December 2015 (thousands)	Percent change, December 2014-15 [2]	National ranking by percent change [3]	Average weekly wage	National ranking by level [3]	Percent change, fourth quarter 2014-15 [2]	National ranking by percent change [3]
United States [4]	141,924.5	1.9	--	$1,082	--	4.4	--
North Carolina	4,247.1	2.5	--	939	30	5.5	8
Buncombe, N.C.	127.7	3.4	63	841	304	5.3	127
Catawba, N.C.	85.3	2.2	144	836	311	8.9	9
Cumberland, N.C.	119.7	0.7	273	814	320	6.1	73
Durham, N.C.	194.8	3.8	37	1,278	40	4.2	218
Forsyth, N.C.	183.4	1.1	235	976	182	4.7	175
Guilford, N.C.	281.1	1.9	171	930	225	4.7	175
Mecklenburg, N.C.	658.4	4.0	33	1,204	57	6.8	36
New Hanover, N.C.	107.3	2.8	108	866	288	4.7	175
Wake, N.C.	525.1	3.6	51	1,071	108	4.2	218

Footnotes:
(1) Average weekly wages were calculated using unrounded data.
(2) Percent changes were computed from quarterly employment and pay data adjusted for noneconomic county reclassifications.
(3) Ranking does not include data for Puerto Rico or the Virgin Islands.
(4) Totals for the United States do not include data for Puerto Rico or the Virgin Islands.
Note: Data are preliminary. Covered employment and wages includes workers covered by Unemployment Insurance (UI) and Unemployment Compensation for Federal Employees (UCFE) programs.

Table 2. Covered employment and wages in the United States and all counties in North Carolina, fourth quarter 2015

Area	Employment December 2015	Average Weekly Wage [1]
United States [2]	141,924,459	$1,082
North Carolina	4,247,050	939
Alamance	59,594	762
Alexander	9,027	645
Alleghany	3,365	591
Anson	7,559	681
Ashe	7,043	671
Avery	6,211	623
Beaufort	15,917	731
Bertie	6,516	613
Bladen	12,924	718
Brunswick	29,370	758
Buncombe	127,696	841
Burke	30,087	723
Cabarrus	71,627	807
Caldwell	23,813	722
Camden	1,381	810
Carteret	22,321	669
Caswell	3,038	675
Catawba	85,314	836
Chatham	14,403	736
Cherokee	7,823	669
Chowan	4,635	741
Clay	2,130	673
Cleveland	34,057	751
Columbus	15,670	676
Craven	39,500	833
Cumberland	119,732	814
Currituck	5,742	734
Dare	16,992	660
Davidson	42,457	762
Davie	12,231	691
Duplin	20,169	664
Durham	194,812	1,278
Edgecombe	16,847	712
Forsyth	183,426	976
Franklin	11,755	799
Gaston	71,944	796
Gates	1,467	728
Graham	1,906	701
Granville	20,470	840
Greene	4,168	642
Guilford	281,064	930
Halifax	15,885	665
Harnett	23,951	677
Haywood	17,070	707
Henderson	36,019	767
Hertford	9,106	728
Hoke	8,134	658
Hyde	1,967	612
Iredell	70,705	944
Jackson	12,789	706
Johnston	46,962	750
Jones	1,579	710
Lee	25,674	771
Lenoir	27,943	733

Note: See footnotes at end of table.

Table 2. Covered employment and wages in the United States and all counties in North Carolina, fourth quarter 2015 - Continued

Area	Employment December 2015	Average Weekly Wage [1]
Lincoln	22,125	744
McDowell	16,265	677
Macon	10,767	659
Madison	3,770	668
Martin	6,985	601
Mecklenburg	658,424	1,204
Mitchell	4,821	662
Montgomery	9,218	709
Moore	33,811	798
Nash	41,632	757
New Hanover	107,333	866
Northampton	5,441	711
Onslow	48,851	663
Orange	67,915	1,094
Pamlico	3,284	600
Pasquotank	16,035	724
Pender	10,735	685
Perquimans	2,039	649
Person	10,158	751
Pitt	75,851	873
Polk	4,933	601
Randolph	44,514	720
Richmond	13,638	685
Robeson	39,801	652
Rockingham	26,425	711
Rowan	47,827	805
Rutherford	18,421	681
Sampson	18,421	740
Scotland	11,989	728
Stanly	19,066	680
Stokes	6,924	609
Surry	28,799	687
Swain	10,046	704
Transylvania	8,443	673
Tyrrell	1,103	633
Union	60,350	849
Vance	14,953	680
Wake	525,104	1,071
Warren	3,413	622
Washington	3,520	782
Watauga	22,516	715
Wayne	42,639	729
Wilkes	21,695	704
Wilson	37,580	814
Yadkin	10,011	671
Yancey	3,692	629

Footnotes
(1) Average weekly wages were calculated using unrounded data.
(2) Totals for the United States do not include data for Puerto Rico or the Virgin Islands.
NOTE: Includes workers covered by Unemployment Insurance (UI) and Unemployment Compensation for Federal Employees (UCFE) programs. Data are preliminary.

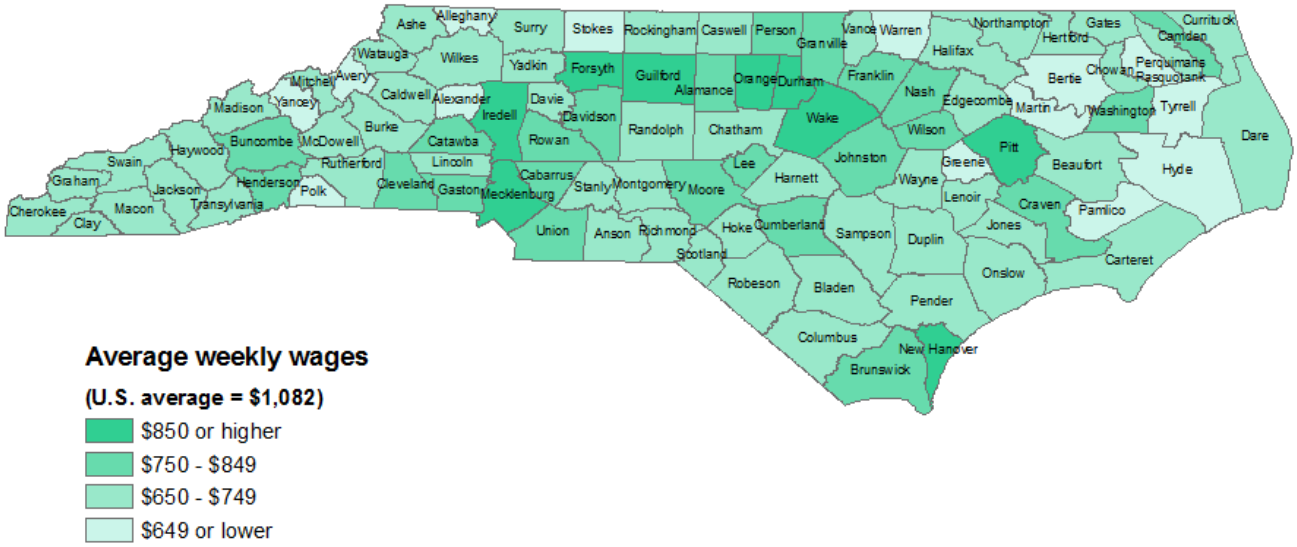
Table 3. Covered employment and wages by state, fourth quarter 2015

State	Employment		Average weekly wage [1]			
	December 2015 (thousands)	Percent change, December 2014-15	Average weekly wage	National ranking by level	Percent change, fourth quarter 2014-15	National ranking by percent change
United States [2]	141,924.5	1.9	$1,082	--	4.4	--
Alabama	1,916.2	1.4	912	37	3.4	37
Alaska	315.9	-0.5	1,095	13	2.9	43
Arizona	2,701.8	2.6	967	24	4.4	28
Arkansas	1,201.4	1.7	838	46	3.8	35
California	16,593.8	3.1	1,274	5	5.4	10
Colorado	2,537.5	2.5	1,103	11	3.3	40
Connecticut	1,685.1	0.3	1,334	4	4.3	29
Delaware	441.2	1.8	1,086	15	3.4	37
District of Columbia	754.2	2.2	1,756	1	3.4	37
Florida	8,308.1	3.7	958	26	5.2	16
Georgia	4,249.4	2.9	1,001	21	4.5	27
Hawaii	653.0	2.2	957	27	5.4	10
Idaho	670.1	3.4	803	50	2.6	45
Illinois	5,931.2	1.4	1,146	8	5.1	18
Indiana	2,996.3	1.7	891	40	5.3	14
Iowa	1,539.0	0.7	920	34	5.7	3
Kansas	1,382.1	0.4	898	38	5.0	20
Kentucky	1,881.3	1.6	885	41	5.9	1
Louisiana	1,937.4	-1.0	940	29	1.8	47
Maine	596.9	0.7	873	43	5.7	3
Maryland	2,636.7	1.7	1,175	7	5.6	5
Massachusetts	3,479.1	1.6	1,385	2	5.4	10
Michigan	4,218.9	1.5	1,043	18	5.9	1
Minnesota	2,805.8	1.5	1,073	16	4.8	22
Mississippi	1,133.8	1.3	770	51	3.1	41
Missouri	2,759.6	1.8	933	33	4.6	25
Montana	453.2	2.5	818	49	3.0	42
Nebraska	971.8	1.4	880	42	5.1	18
Nevada	1,272.2	3.5	935	32	4.0	31
New Hampshire	648.6	1.7	1,139	9	5.4	10
New Jersey	3,988.4	1.7	1,262	6	4.0	31
New Mexico	808.9	-0.1	865	44	1.8	47
New York	9,227.6	1.7	1,372	3	3.9	34
North Carolina	4,247.1	2.5	939	30	5.5	8
North Dakota	428.1	-5.9	1,021	20	-2.8	51
Ohio	5,328.8	1.2	964	25	4.6	25
Oklahoma	1,605.0	-0.7	896	39	2.3	46
Oregon	1,814.8	3.3	979	23	5.5	8
Pennsylvania	5,759.7	0.7	1,063	17	4.9	21
Rhode Island	478.1	1.5	1,043	18	4.0	31
South Carolina	1,987.1	2.8	860	45	5.3	14
South Dakota	417.7	1.2	832	47	5.2	16
Tennessee	2,898.1	2.8	980	22	5.6	5
Texas	11,832.1	1.4	1,099	12	2.7	44
Utah	1,375.6	3.8	913	36	4.7	23
Vermont	312.1	0.3	919	35	4.1	30
Virginia	3,806.2	3.0	1,094	14	3.5	36
Washington	3,137.2	2.3	1,132	10	4.7	23
West Virginia	703.7	-1.3	829	48	1.3	49
Wisconsin	2,820.5	1.1	944	28	5.6	5
Wyoming	276.0	-2.9	937	31	-1.7	50
Puerto Rico	929.9	-1.6	565	[3]	1.6	[3]
Virgin Islands	38.4	-0.3	787	[3]	4.7	[3]

Note: See footnotes at end of table.

Footnotes:
(1) Average weekly wages were calculated using unrounded data.
(2) Totals for the United States do not include data for Puerto Rico or the Virgin Islands.
(3) Data not included in the national ranking.
Note: Data are preliminary. Covered employment and wages includes workers covered by Unemployment Insurance (UI) and Unemployment Compensation for Federal Employees (UCFE) programs.

Chart 1. Average weekly wages by county in North Carolina, fourth quarter 2015



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.