

# NEWS RELEASE

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## PRODUCTIVITY AND COSTS BY INDUSTRY WHOLESALE TRADE AND RETAIL TRADE INDUSTRIES – 2020

**Labor productivity** rose 7.7 percent in retail trade and 3.6 percent in wholesale trade in 2020, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported today. **Unit labor costs**, which reflect the total labor costs required to produce a unit of output, rose in wholesale trade and fell in retail trade.

Annual productivity growth for retail trade in 2020 was the highest since measurement began in 1987. In 2020 for retail trade and wholesale trade, hours worked fell at the fastest rates since 2009. Output increased at an accelerating rate for retail trade in 2020 while it decreased for the first time since 2010 for wholesale trade.

**Chart 1. Largest changes in productivity in NAICS 4-digit wholesale and retail trade industries, 2020**

Output Percent Change

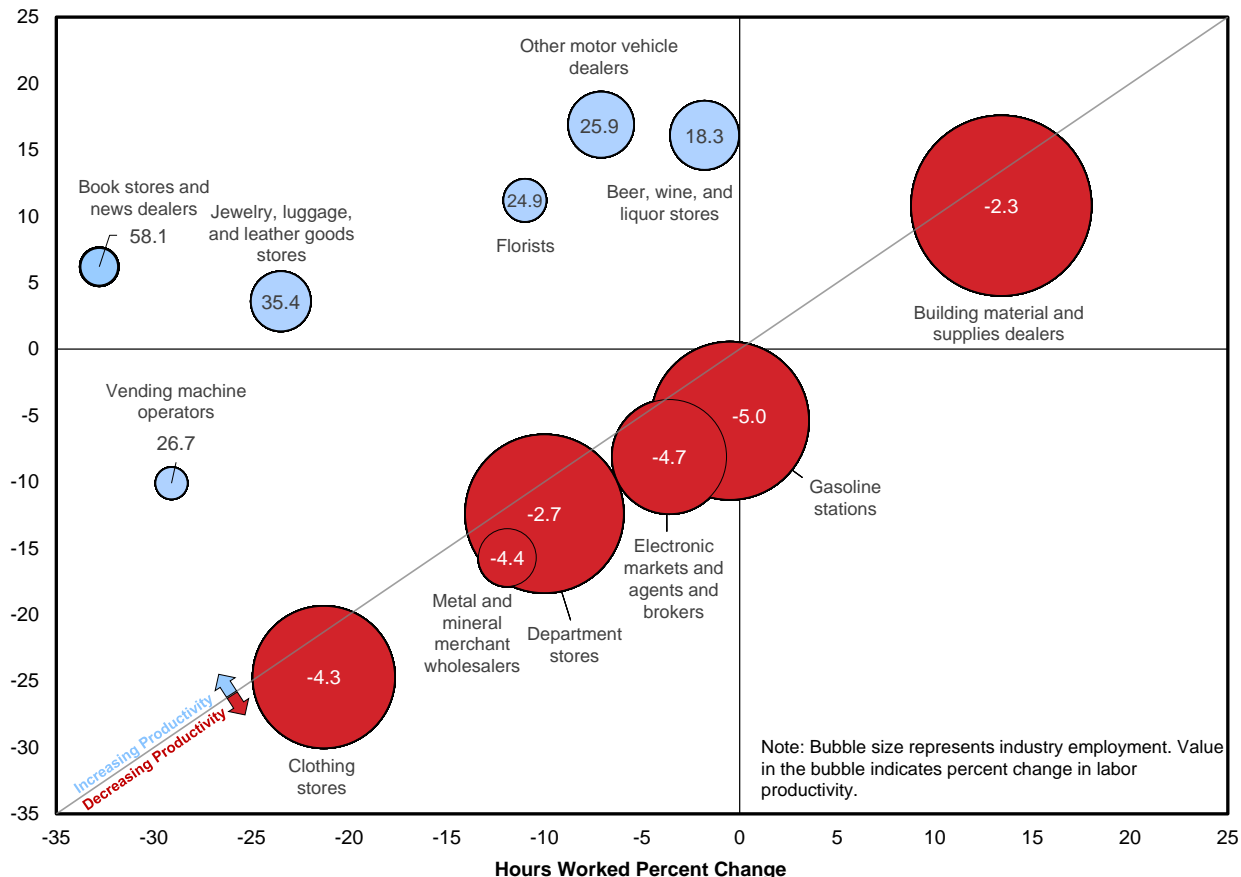


Chart 1 shows the percent changes in output and hours worked for industries with the largest increases and decreases in productivity in 2020. Change in productivity is approximately equal to the change in output minus the change in hours worked. Industries above the diagonal line experienced growth in productivity while industries below the diagonal line experienced declines.

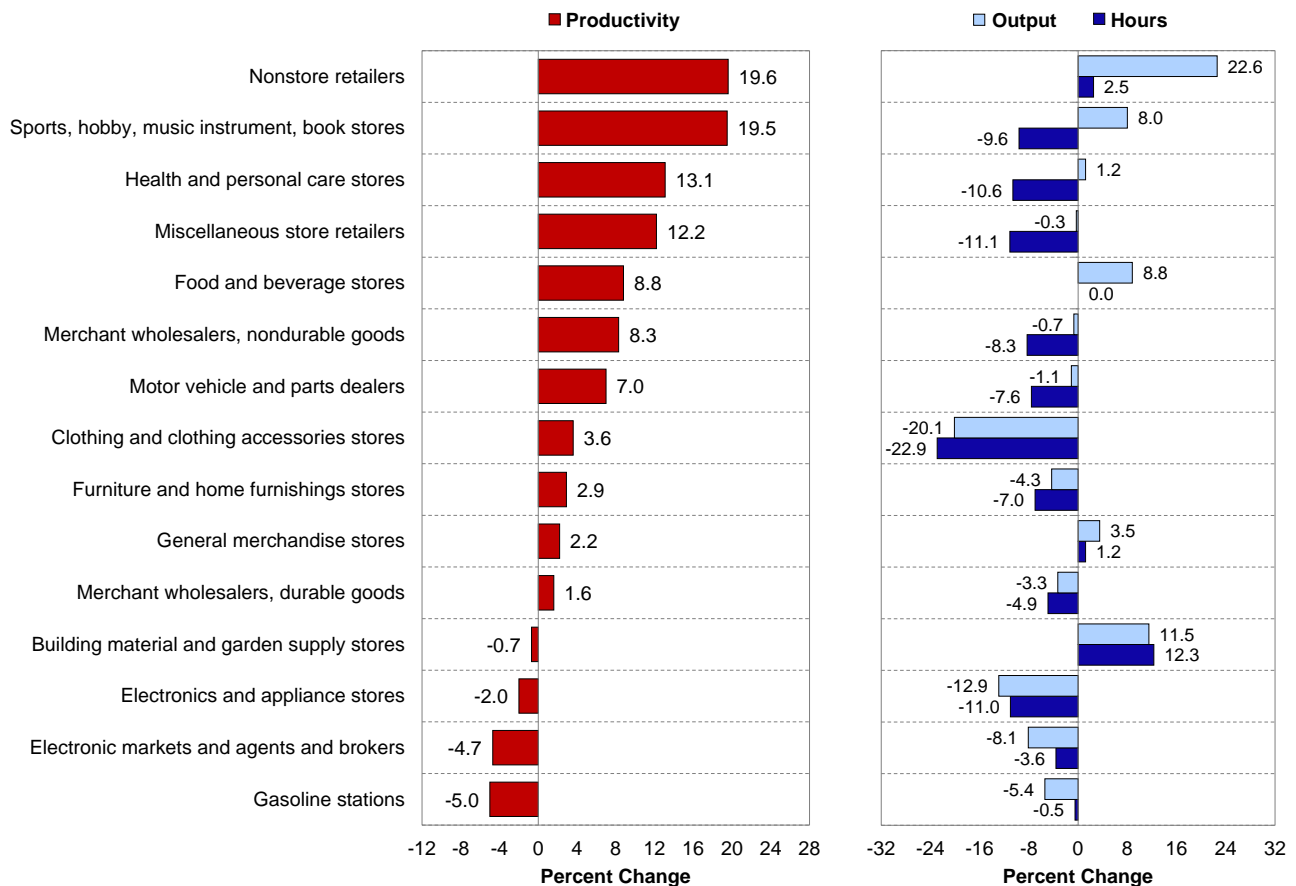
Among the six NAICS 4-digit industries with the highest productivity growth, five reported growth in output while all six showed declines in hours worked. Productivity growth was greatest in book stores and news dealers (+58.1 percent) where there was a moderate growth in output and a substantial decline in hours worked. All six industries were in the bottom third of trade employment.

Of the six NAICS 4-digit industries with the largest declines in productivity, hours worked, and output decreased in all but one, building material and supplies dealers. The two industries with the greatest decreases in productivity were gasoline stations (-5.0 percent) and wholesale electronic markets and agents and brokers (-4.7 percent). Five of these six industries were in the top third of trade employment.

### Labor Productivity Rose in Majority of Industries in 2020

Productivity increased in 11 of the 15 NAICS 3-digit industries studied in 2020. (See table 1.) Seven industries had productivity gains of at least 7.0 percent; among these, the largest changes occurred in nonstore retailers (+19.6 percent) and sports, hobby, music instrument, and book stores (+19.5 percent). Nonstore retailers also had the largest increase in output (+22.6 percent). Of the four industries with productivity declines, gasoline stations experienced the largest drop (-5.0 percent). (See chart 2).

**Chart 2. Productivity change in NAICS 3-digit wholesale and retail trade industries, 2020**



In **wholesale trade**, productivity rose 3.6 percent as output fell 2.6 percent and hours worked decreased 6.0 percent.

- Productivity rose in both durable goods wholesalers and nondurable goods wholesalers at 1.6 percent and 8.3 percent, respectively.
- Productivity increased in 15 of the 19 NAICS 4-digit wholesale trade industries while output rose in 7 industries and hours worked fell in 18.
- The highest increase in productivity occurred in paper and paper product merchant wholesalers (+17.7 percent) because hours worked declined at a much faster rate (-15.6 percent) than output (-0.7 percent).

In **retail trade**, productivity increased by 7.7 percent as output grew 3.9 percent and hours worked fell 3.6 percent.

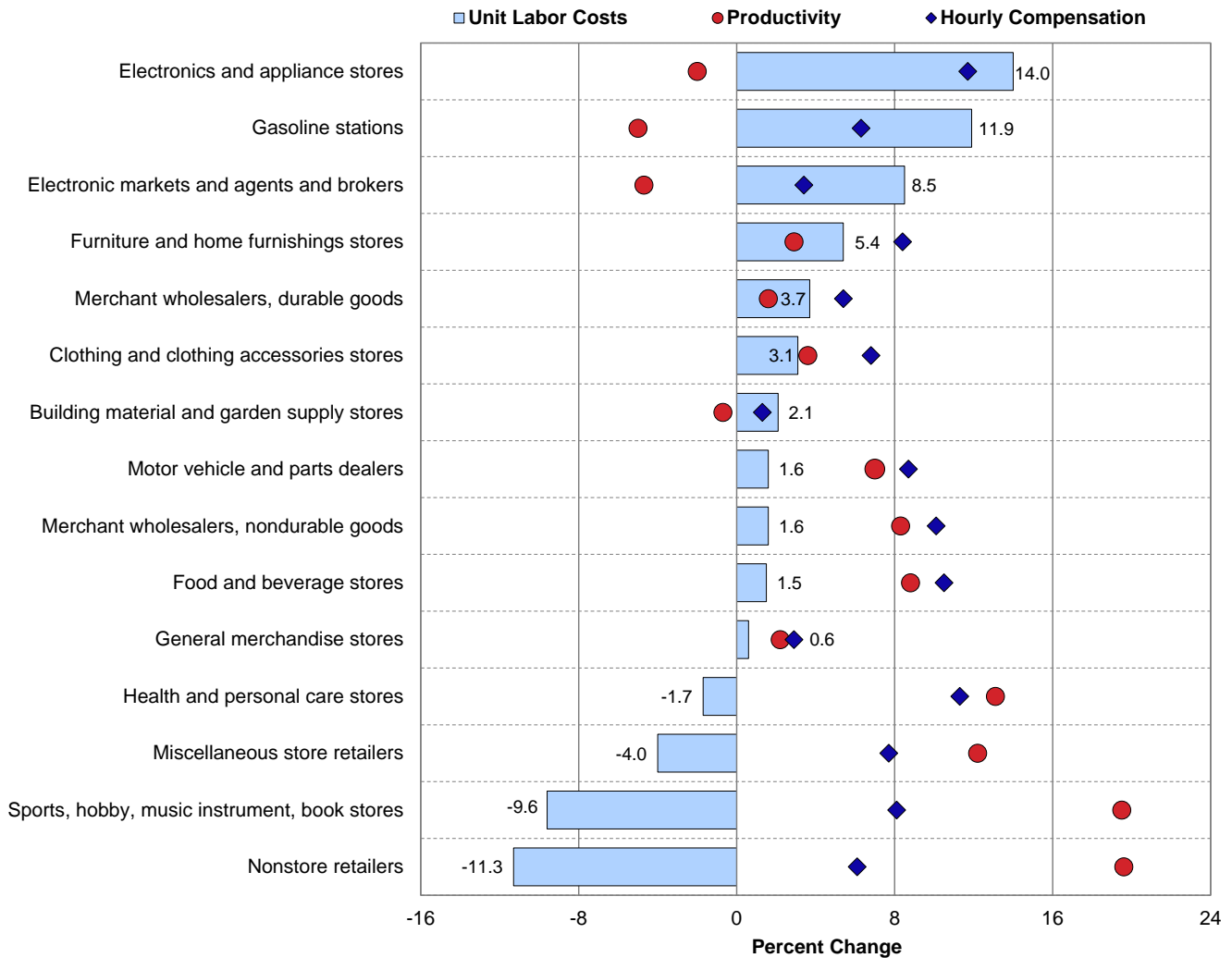
- Productivity increased in 20 of the 27 NAICS 4-digit retail trade industries while output grew in 13 industries and hours worked fell in 22.
- The largest productivity increase (+58.1 percent) occurred in book stores and news dealers as hours fell 32.8 percent while output increased 6.2 percent.
- In the largest retail employer, grocery stores, productivity increased 7.6 percent as output increased 8.5 percent and hours worked rose by 0.8 percent.

### **Unit Labor Costs Decline in 37 Percent of NAICS 4-Digit Industries in 2020**

When productivity gains outpace hourly compensation, unit labor costs decline.

- Unit labor costs fell in 4 out of 15 NAICS 3-digit wholesale and retail trade industries in 2020. All unit labor cost declines occurred in industries where productivity rose. (See chart 3).
- Unit labor costs declined in 5 of 19 NAICS 4-digit wholesale trade industries. In retail trade, 12 of 27 NAICS 4-digit industries had declines in unit labor costs.
- Hourly compensation, defined as labor compensation per hour worked, rose in 43 of the 46 NAICS 4-digit industries.

**Chart 3. Unit labor costs, productivity, and hourly compensation in NAICS 3-digit wholesale and retail trade industries, 2020**



### Long-term Labor Productivity Increases for All but One Industry

From 1987 to 2020, **labor productivity** increased at an average annual rate of 2.8 percent in wholesale trade and 3.0 percent in retail trade. (See table 2.)

- Among the NAICS 4-digit industries, productivity rose from 1987 to 2020 in 45 industries and declined in only 1 industry, metal and mineral merchant wholesalers.
- Of the 45 NAICS 4-digit industries with increasing productivity growth, 38 experienced rising output while 20 had an increase in hours worked.
- Median productivity among NAICS 4-digit industries grew at an average annual rate of 2.2 percent.
- The 2007 to 2020 productivity growth in durable wholesale, nondurable wholesale, and retail trade industries was slower than during the 1987-2007 period. (See chart 4).
- The number of NAICS 4-digit industries with increasing productivity dropped from 43 out of 46 during the 1987-2007 period to 37 during the 2007-2020 period.

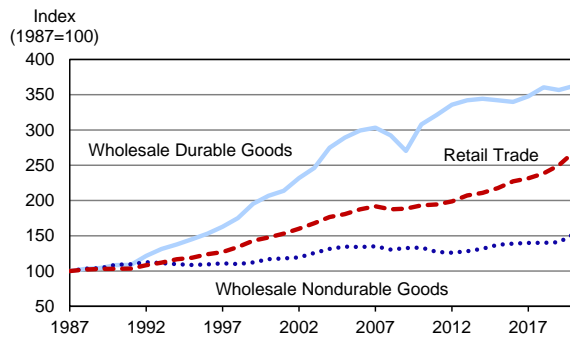
## Long-term Trends in Unit Labor Costs Vary by Sector

From 1987 to 2020, **unit labor costs** declined slightly at an average annual rate of 0.1 percent in wholesale durable goods, increased at an average annual rate of 2.7 percent in wholesale nondurable goods, and were unchanged in retail trade. (See table 2.)

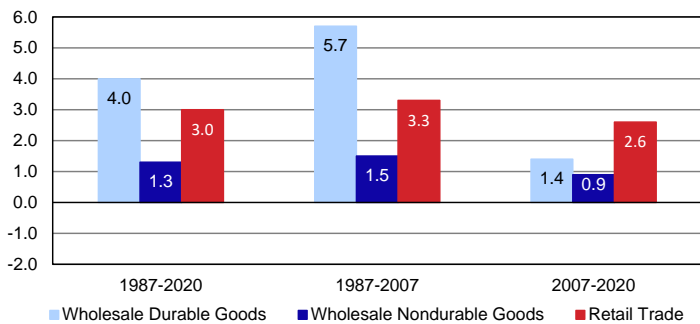
- Among the NAICS 4-digit industries, unit labor costs rose in 16 out of 19 wholesale trade and 13 out of 27 retail trade industries from 1987 to 2020.
- From 2007 to 2020, unit labor costs rose in 30 out of 46 industries. All industries with declines in unit labor costs experienced increases in productivity.
- During the 1987 to 2007 period, electronics and appliance stores experienced the largest declines in unit labor costs and the largest productivity gains among the NAICS 3-digit industries. Although this industry continued to experience the largest declines in unit labor costs in the 2007 to 2020 period, nonstore retailers took the lead in productivity gains.

**Chart 4. Long-term changes in productivity and unit labor costs for wholesale trade industry groups and retail trade industry**

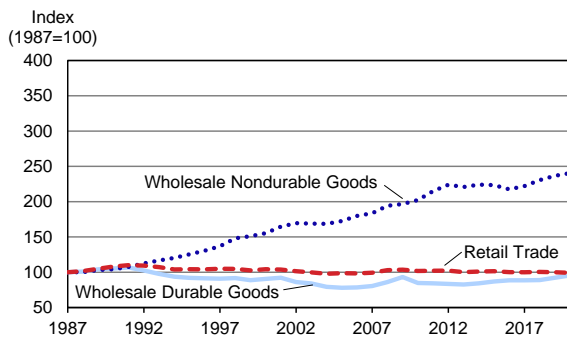
### Labor Productivity



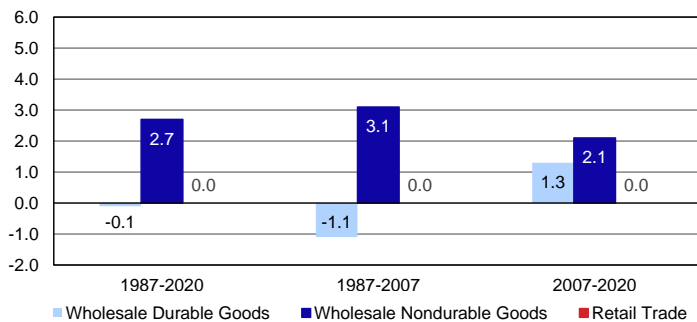
### Average Annual Percent Change



### Unit Labor Costs



### Average Annual Percent Change



## **Additional Information**

The trade measures in this release incorporate 2017 Economic Census data and benchmark data from the Census Bureau's Annual Wholesale Trade Report (January 2021), Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey (May 2021), Annual Retail Trade Survey (January 2021), and Annual Revision of the Monthly Retail and Food Services: Sales and Inventories (April 2021). Accordingly, the labor productivity and output series for all industries have been revised for 2019 and earlier years. Additionally, the unit labor cost measures incorporate preliminary data from the BLS Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (June 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic did not impact the availability of source data used to construct productivity measures in this release. Data source providers continued to collect and publish high quality industry data for 2020. Additional information can be found on the BLS website at [www.bls.gov/covid19/effects-of-covid-19-pandemic-on-productivity-and-costs-statistics.htm#Industry-Productivity](http://www.bls.gov/covid19/effects-of-covid-19-pandemic-on-productivity-and-costs-statistics.htm#Industry-Productivity).

More information about the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) can be found at [www.census.gov/naics/](http://www.census.gov/naics/).

Access the productivity data dashboard at [www.bls.gov/lpc/lpc\\_by\\_industry\\_dashboard.xlsx](http://www.bls.gov/lpc/lpc_by_industry_dashboard.xlsx) for

- Additional industries and sectors
- Detailed data series: indexes of productivity and related measures; rates of change; and levels of industry employment, hours worked, nominal value of production, and labor compensation
- Additional years and long-term data

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## Technical Note

**Labor Productivity:** Labor productivity describes the relationship between real output and the labor hours involved in its production. These measures show the changes from period to period in the amount of goods and services produced per hour worked. Although the labor productivity measures relate output in an industry to hours worked of all persons in that industry, they do not measure the specific contribution of labor to growth in output. Rather, they reflect the joint effects of many influences, including: changes in technology; capital investment; utilization of capacity, energy, and materials; the use of purchased services inputs, including contract employment services; the organization of production; the characteristics and effort of the workforce; and managerial skill.

**Unit Labor Costs:** Unit labor costs represent the cost of labor required to produce one unit of output. The unit labor cost indexes are computed by dividing an index of nominal industry labor compensation by an index of real industry output. Unit labor costs also describe the relationship between compensation per hour worked (hourly compensation) and real output per hour worked (labor productivity). When hourly compensation growth outpaces productivity, unit labor costs increase. Alternatively, when productivity growth exceeds hourly compensation, unit labor costs decrease.

**Output:** Industry output is measured as an annual-weighted index of the changes in the various products (in real terms) provided for sale outside the industry. Real industry output for data in this release is derived by deflating nominal sales or values of production using price indexes. Industry output measures are constructed primarily using data from the economic censuses and annual surveys of the U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce, together with information on price changes from BLS.

**Labor Hours:** Labor hours are measured as annual hours worked by all employed persons in an industry. Data on industry employment and hours come primarily from the BLS Current Employment Statistics (CES) survey and Current Population Survey (CPS). CES data on the number of total and production worker jobs held by wage and salary workers in nonfarm establishments are supplemented with CPS data on self-employed and unpaid family workers to estimate industry employment. Hours worked estimates are derived using CES and CPS employment, CES data on the average weekly hours paid of production workers, CPS data on hours of nonproduction, self-employed, and unpaid family workers, and ratios of hours worked to hours paid based on data from the National Compensation Survey (NCS). For some industries, employment and hours data are supplemented or further disaggregated using data from the BLS Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), the Census Bureau, or other sources. Hours worked are estimated separately for different types of workers and then are directly aggregated; no adjustments for labor composition are made.

**Labor Compensation:** Labor compensation, defined as payroll plus supplemental payments, is a measure of the cost to the employer of securing the services of labor. Payroll includes salaries, wages, commissions, dismissal pay, bonuses, vacation and sick leave pay, and compensation in kind. Supplemental payments include both legally required expenditures and payments for voluntary programs. The legally required portion consists primarily of federal old age and survivors' insurance, unemployment compensation, and workers' compensation. Payments for voluntary programs include all programs not specifically required by legislation, such as the employer portion of private health insurance and pension plans. Industry compensation measures are constructed primarily using data from the BLS QCEW and the economic censuses of the Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce.

**Table 1. Recent labor productivity, unit labor costs, and related data**

Industry	2017 NAICS code	2020 Employment (thousands)	Percent change, 2019-2020					
			Labor productivity	Unit labor costs	Output	Hours worked	Labor compensation	Hourly compensation
<b>Wholesale Trade</b>								
Wholesale trade.....	42	5,769.9	3.6	3.1	-2.6	-6.0	0.4	6.9
Merchant wholesalers, durable goods.....	423	3,144.4	1.6	3.7	-3.3	-4.9	0.2	5.4
Motor vehicles and parts.....	4231	350.7	2.3	6.2	-7.0	-9.1	-1.2	8.7
Furniture and furnishings.....	4232	108.9	4.5	1.8	-7.6	-11.6	-5.9	6.4
Lumber and construction supplies.....	4233	247.2	-1.8	0.8	-2.2	-0.4	-1.4	-1.0
Commercial equipment.....	4234	697.9	1.4	3.4	1.4	0.0	4.9	4.9
Metals and minerals.....	4235	126.4	-4.4	10.2	-15.7	-11.9	-7.2	5.3
Appliances and electric goods.....	4236	342.8	6.3	-2.5	-0.9	-6.7	-3.3	3.6
Hardware and plumbing.....	4237	280.0	7.1	-1.5	4.0	-3.0	2.4	5.6
Machinery and supplies.....	4238	694.2	2.4	1.8	-3.3	-5.5	-1.5	4.2
Miscellaneous durable goods.....	4239	296.3	6.0	1.7	-1.0	-6.6	0.6	7.8
Merchant wholesalers, nondurable goods.....	424	2,129.9	8.3	1.6	-0.7	-8.3	0.9	10.1
Paper and paper products.....	4241	123.1	17.7	-4.3	-0.7	-15.6	-4.9	12.6
Druggists' goods.....	4242	233.3	13.0	2.3	5.2	-6.9	7.6	15.6
Apparel and piece goods.....	4243	131.0	-0.4	10.2	-20.6	-20.3	-12.5	9.8
Grocery and related products.....	4244	781.3	5.8	4.0	-2.5	-7.8	1.4	10.0
Farm product raw materials.....	4245	71.7	4.6	0.2	3.5	-1.1	3.7	4.8
Chemicals.....	4246	143.5	2.3	5.9	-7.4	-9.5	-2.0	8.3
Petroleum.....	4247	104.5	8.0	-4.2	1.3	-6.2	-2.9	3.5
Alcoholic beverages.....	4248	201.3	14.3	-4.0	5.9	-7.4	1.7	9.8
Miscellaneous nondurable goods.....	4249	340.2	5.2	2.0	0.2	-4.7	2.2	7.3
Electronic markets and agents and brokers.....	425	495.6	-4.7	8.5	-8.1	-3.6	-0.3	3.4
Electronic markets and agents and brokers.....	4251	495.6	-4.7	8.5	-8.1	-3.6	-0.3	3.4
<b>Retail Trade</b>								
Retail trade.....	44-45	15,577.6	7.7	-0.7	3.9	-3.6	3.1	6.9
Motor vehicle and parts dealers.....	441	1,960.1	7.0	1.6	-1.1	-7.6	0.5	8.7
Automobile dealers.....	4411	1,232.6	8.2	2.1	-2.5	-9.9	-0.5	10.5
Other motor vehicle dealers.....	4412	160.9	25.9	-5.9	16.9	-7.1	10.1	18.5
Auto parts, accessories, and tire stores.....	4413	566.6	1.8	0.6	-0.5	-2.3	0.1	2.5
Furniture and home furnishings stores.....	442	445.6	2.9	5.4	-4.3	-7.0	0.9	8.4
Furniture stores.....	4421	214.5	7.1	2.8	-2.5	-9.0	0.2	10.1
Home furnishings stores.....	4422	231.1	-1.6	8.4	-6.3	-4.7	1.6	6.6
Electronics and appliance stores.....	443	439.6	-2.0	14.0	-12.9	-11.0	-0.7	11.7
Electronics and appliance stores.....	4431	439.6	-2.0	14.0	-12.9	-11.0	-0.7	11.7
Building material and garden supply stores.....	444	1,406.2	-0.7	2.1	11.5	12.3	13.8	1.3
Building material and supplies dealers.....	4441	1,228.3	-2.3	3.2	10.8	13.4	14.3	0.8
Lawn and garden equipment and supplies stores.....	4442	177.9	11.0	-5.5	16.8	5.2	10.3	4.9
Food and beverage stores.....	445	3,164.8	8.8	1.5	8.8	0.0	10.5	10.5
Grocery stores.....	4451	2,770.8	7.6	2.8	8.5	0.8	11.6	10.6
Specialty food stores.....	4452	217.7	9.0	0.9	-0.9	-9.1	0.0	10.0
Beer, wine and liquor stores.....	4453	176.3	18.3	-7.7	16.1	-1.8	7.2	9.2
Health and personal care stores.....	446	990.0	13.1	-1.7	1.2	-10.6	-0.5	11.3
Health and personal care stores.....	4461	990.0	13.1	-1.7	1.2	-10.6	-0.5	11.3
Gasoline stations.....	447	940.9	-5.0	11.9	-5.4	-0.5	5.9	6.3
Gasoline stations.....	4471	940.9	-5.0	11.9	-5.4	-0.5	5.9	6.3
Clothing and clothing accessories stores.....	448	1,045.4	3.6	3.1	-20.1	-22.9	-17.7	6.8
Clothing stores.....	4481	762.1	-4.3	7.5	-24.7	-21.3	-19.0	2.9
Shoe stores.....	4482	150.0	12.1	9.6	-19.9	-28.5	-12.2	22.8
Jewelry, luggage, and leather goods stores.....	4483	133.3	35.4	-19.5	3.6	-23.5	-16.6	9.0
Sports, hobby, music instruments, book stores.....	451	505.3	19.5	-9.6	8.0	-9.6	-2.3	8.1
Sporting goods and musical instrument stores.....	4511	450.4	16.0	-7.0	8.3	-6.6	0.7	7.8



**Table 1. Recent labor productivity, unit labor costs, and related data — Continued**

Industry	2017 NAICS code	2020 Employment (thousands)	Percent change, 2019-2020					
			Labor productivity	Unit labor costs	Output	Hours worked	Labor compen- sation	Hourly compen- sation
Book stores and news dealers.....	4512	54.9	58.1	-26.8	6.2	-32.8	-22.3	15.7
General merchandise stores.....	452	3,039.6	2.2	0.6	3.5	1.2	4.2	2.9
Department stores.....	4522	948.6	-2.7	0.7	-12.4	-10.0	-11.8	-2.0
Other general merchandise stores.....	4523	2,091.0	0.5	4.3	7.1	6.5	11.7	4.9
Miscellaneous store retailers.....	453	880.5	12.2	-4.0	-0.3	-11.1	-4.3	7.7
Florists.....	4531	67.4	24.9	-15.3	11.2	-11.0	-5.9	5.7
Office supplies, stationery and gift stores.....	4532	204.1	-0.3	6.2	-21.9	-21.6	-17.0	5.9
Used merchandise stores.....	4533	188.4	3.4	7.0	-13.7	-16.5	-7.7	10.6
Other miscellaneous store retailers.....	4539	420.6	13.7	-5.8	9.8	-3.4	3.5	7.1
Nonstore retailers.....	454	759.6	19.6	-11.3	22.6	2.5	8.8	6.1
Electronic shopping and mail-order houses.....	4541	527.0	12.9	-9.8	26.2	11.7	13.8	1.8
Vending machine operators.....	4542	37.2	26.7	-22.4	-10.1	-29.1	-30.2	-1.6
Direct selling establishments.....	4543	195.4	9.9	-1.9	-2.2	-11.0	-4.0	7.9

**Table 2. Long run labor productivity, unit labor costs, and related data**

Industry	2017 NAICS code	2020 Employment (thousands)	Average annual percent change, 1987-2020					
			Labor productivity	Unit labor costs	Output	Hours worked	Labor compen- sation	Hourly compen- sation
<b>Wholesale Trade</b>								
Wholesale trade.....	42	5,769.9	2.8	1.0	2.9	0.1	3.9	3.8
Merchant wholesalers, durable goods.....	423	3,144.4	4.0	-0.1	4.1	0.1	3.9	3.8
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Lumber and construction supplies.....	4233	247.2	0.6	1.9	1.3	0.7	3.3	2.5
Commercial equipment.....	4234	697.9	10.9	-6.1	11.1	0.2	4.3	4.1
Metals and minerals.....	4235	126.4	-0.4	3.9	-0.5	-0.1	3.4	3.5
Appliances and electric goods.....	4236	342.8	6.6	-2.3	6.2	-0.4	3.8	4.2
Hardware and plumbing.....	4237	280.0	1.7	1.9	2.5	0.8	4.4	3.6
Machinery and supplies.....	4238	694.2	1.7	2.1	1.7	-0.1	3.8	3.9
Miscellaneous durable goods.....	4239	296.3	1.2	2.5	1.5	0.2	4.0	3.8
Merchant wholesalers, nondurable goods.....	424	2,129.9	1.3	2.7	1.2	-0.1	4.0	4.0
Paper and paper products.....	4241	123.1	1.5	2.0	0.4	-1.1	2.4	3.6
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Apparel and piece goods.....	4243	131.0	1.7	1.8	0.6	-1.1	2.5	3.6
Grocery and related products.....	4244	781.3	1.1	2.4	1.5	0.4	3.9	3.5
Farm product raw materials.....	4245	71.7	1.3	3.4	-0.3	-1.6	3.0	4.7
Chemicals.....	4246	143.5	0.3	3.3	0.6	0.3	3.9	3.6
Petroleum.....	4247	104.5	2.6	2.0	1.2	-1.4	3.2	4.7
Alcoholic beverages.....	4248	201.3	0.7	2.5	2.3	1.5	4.8	3.3
Miscellaneous nondurable goods.....	4249	340.2	0.5	2.9	-0.1	-0.6	2.9	3.5
Electronic markets and agents and brokers.....	425	495.6	2.5	-0.1	3.8	1.3	3.7	2.4
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Grocery stores.....	4451	2,770.8	0.8	2.3	0.9	0.1	3.2	3.1
Specialty food stores.....	4452	217.7	0.9	1.6	-0.2	-1.0	1.5	2.5
Beer, wine and liquor stores.....	4453	176.3	2.3	0.6	1.8	-0.5	2.4	2.9
Health and personal care stores.....	446	990.0	1.9	1.5	2.6	0.6	4.1	3.5
Health and personal care stores.....	4461	990.0	1.9	1.5	2.6	0.6	4.1	3.5
Gasoline stations.....	447	940.9	1.2	1.9	0.9	-0.2	2.9	3.1
Gasoline stations.....	4471	940.9	1.2	1.9	0.9	-0.2	2.9	3.1
Clothing and clothing accessories stores.....	448	1,045.4	4.0	-0.9	2.8	-1.1	1.8	3.0
Clothing stores.....	4481	762.1	4.1	-1.1	3.0	-1.0	1.9	3.0
Shoe stores.....	4482	150.0	3.0	-0.2	1.6	-1.3	1.4	2.8
Jewelry, luggage, and leather goods stores.....	4483	133.3	4.2	-0.7	2.6	-1.5	1.9	3.4
Sports, hobby, music instruments, book stores.....	451	505.3	4.0	-0.9	3.7	-0.3	2.8	3.1
Sporting goods and musical instrument stores.....	4511	450.4	4.5	-1.3	4.6	0.1	3.2	3.1

**Table 2. Long run labor productivity, unit labor costs, and related data — Continued**

Industry	2017 NAICS code	2020 Employment (thousands)	Average annual percent change, 1987-2020					
			Labor productivity	Unit labor costs	Output	Hours worked	Labor compen- sation	Hourly compen- sation
Book stores and news dealers.....	4512	54.9	2.7	0.6	-0.1	-2.7	0.5	3.3
General merchandise stores.....	452	3,039.6	3.0	-0.7	4.1	1.0	3.4	2.3
Department stores.....	4522	948.6	0.6	1.0	-0.2	-0.8	0.8	1.6
Other general merchandise stores.....	4523	2,091.0	4.8	-1.6	7.2	2.3	5.5	3.2
Miscellaneous store retailers.....	453	880.5	3.4	-0.8	2.9	-0.5	2.1	2.6
Florists.....	4531	67.4	3.3	-0.2	-0.1	-3.3	-0.2	3.2
Office supplies, stationery and gift stores.....	4532	204.1	5.2	-2.0	2.7	-2.4	0.6	3.1
Used merchandise stores.....	4533	188.4	4.4	-1.6	5.1	0.7	3.4	2.7
Other miscellaneous store retailers.....	4539	420.6	1.3	0.5	2.6	1.3	3.1	1.7
Nonstore retailers.....	454	759.6	8.5	-3.9	9.4	0.9	5.2	4.3
Electronic shopping and mail-order houses.....	4541	527.0	9.8	-4.7	14.3	4.1	9.0	4.7
Vending machine operators.....	4542	37.2	1.4	1.9	-1.7	-3.1	0.2	3.3
Direct selling establishments.....	4543	195.4	3.0	-0.2	1.2	-1.7	1.0	2.8