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COUNTY EMPLOYMENT AND WAGES IN ARKANSAS – FOURTH QUARTER 2011

Employment increased in the three largest Arkansas counties from December 2010 to December 2011, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported today. (Large counties are those with 2010 annual average employment levels of 75,000 or more.) Regional Commissioner Stanley W. Suchman noted that Benton County had the largest increase, up 2.0 percent, followed by Washington (1.9 percent) and Pulaski (0.3 percent). (See table 1.)

Nationally, employment advanced 1.4 percent from December 2010 to December 2011 as 266 of the 322 largest U.S. counties registered increases. Kern County, Calif., recorded the highest percentage increase in the country, up 5.3 percent over the year. Benton, Wash., registered the largest percentage employment decline, down 3.4 percent.

Among the three largest counties in Arkansas, employment was highest in Pulaski County (246,500) in December 2011. The two other large Arkansas counties, Benton and Washington, had employment levels below 100,000. Together, the three largest Arkansas counties accounted for 37.6 percent of total employment within the state. Nationwide, the 322 largest counties made up 70.7 percent of total U.S. employment.

From the fourth quarter of 2010 to the fourth quarter of 2011, Benton County recorded the fastest rate of increase in average weekly wages among Arkansas' largest counties, registering a gain of 2.7 percent. (See table 1.) Benton and Pulaski Counties both recorded an average wage of \$869 per week, highest among the three large Arkansas counties.

Nationally, the average weekly wage decreased 1.7 percent over the year to \$955 in the fourth quarter of 2011. This marked one of only five nationwide declines for average weekly wages in the history of the series which dates back to 1978. Smaller bonus payments in the fourth quarter of 2011 contributed to the decrease in the national average weekly wage.

Employment and wage levels (but not over-the-year changes) are also available for the 72 counties in Arkansas with employment levels below 75,000. Wage levels in all but one of these smaller counties were below the national average. (See table 2.)

Large county wage changes

Although average weekly wages in Pulaski County fell 0.5 percent from the fourth quarter of 2010, the decline was sufficiently small enough to rank it in the top 20 percent of all large counties (58th). (See table 1.) In contrast, wages in Benton County rose 2.7 percent from the fourth quarter of 2010, ranking 6th among the nation's 322 largest counties. (Data for Washington County did not meet BLS or State agency disclosure standards.)

Over the year, 282 of the 322 largest counties registered decreases in average weekly wages. Olmsted County, Minn., had the largest wage loss, down 21.3 percent from the fourth quarter of 2010. Douglas County, Colo., was second with a wage decrease of 8.6 percent, followed by the counties of Williamson, Tenn. (-6.7 percent), Durham, N.C. (-6.5 percent), and St. Clair, Ill. (-6.2 percent).

Among the large counties, 36 experienced over-the-year wage increases. Tulsa, Okla., had the largest wage increase with a gain of 8.6 percent. Harford, Md., had the second largest increase in average weekly wages, up 5.8 percent from the fourth quarter 2010, followed by Lake, Ohio (4.9 percent), Snohomish, Wash. (3.0 percent), and Westmoreland, Pa. (2.9 percent).

Large county average weekly wages

Average weekly wages in the three large Arkansas counties were well below the national average of \$955 per week, ranking in the bottom half nationally in the fourth quarter of 2011. The counties of Benton and Pulaski both with average weekly wages of \$869, ranked 166th, and Washington County at \$828 per week ranked 216th.

Nationally, 103 large counties registered average weekly wages above the U.S. average of \$955 in the fourth quarter of 2011. New York, N.Y., held the top position among the highest-paid large counties with an average weekly wage of \$1,889. Santa Clara, Calif., was second at \$1,836, followed by Washington, D.C. (\$1,668).

More than two-thirds of the largest U.S. counties (219) reported weekly wages below the national average. Horry County, S.C., reported the lowest wage (\$569), followed by the Texas counties of Cameron (\$597) and Hidalgo (\$601). Wages in these lowest-ranked counties were less than one-third of the average weekly wage reported for the highest-ranked county, New York.

Average weekly wages in Arkansas' smaller counties

Among the 72 smaller counties in Arkansas – those with employment below 75,000 – only Calhoun reported wages above the national average, at \$958 per week compared to \$955 nationwide. The remaining smaller counties registered wages below \$800, with Newton County reporting the lowest wage in the state, averaging \$442 in the fourth quarter of 2011. (See table 2.)

When all 75 counties in Arkansas were considered, 6 reported average weekly wages under \$500, 34 reported wages from \$500 to \$599, 23 had wages from \$600 to \$699, 8 had wages from \$700 to \$799, and 4 averaged \$800 or more per week. (See chart 1.) The top-paying counties were concentrated around the metropolitan areas of Fayetteville and Little Rock, as well as along the southern border of the state. The lower-paid counties, those with wages under \$500, were generally located in the northern quadrant of the state.

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 the QCEW Web site at 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 2010 edition of this publication, which was published in November 2011, contains selected data produced by Business Employment Dynamics (BED) on job gains and losses, as well as selected data from the first quarter 2011 version of the national news release. Tables and additional content from *Employment and Wages Annual Averages 2010* are now available online at www.bls.gov/cew/cewbultn10.htm. The 2011 edition of *Employment and Wages Annual Averages Online* will be available later in 2012.

Information in this release will be made available to sensory impaired individuals upon request. Voice phone: 202-691-5200; TDD message referral phone number: 1-800-877-8339.

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 9.2 million employer reports cover 131.3 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 BLS 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.

Table 1. Covered (1) employment and wages in the United States and the 3 largest counties in Arkansas, fourth quarter 2011 (2)

Area	Employment			Average Weekly Wage (3)			
	December 2011 (thousands)	Percent change, December 2010-11 (4)	National ranking by percent change (5)	Average weekly wage	National ranking by level (5)	Percent change, fourth quarter 2010-11 (4)	National ranking by percent change (5)
United States (6)	131,254.2	1.4	--	\$955	--	-1.7	--
Arkansas	1,157.1	0.9	--	736	47	-1.2	19
Benton, Ark.	95.8	2.0	78	869	166	2.7	6
Pulaski, Ark.	246.5	0.3	238	869	166	-0.5	58
Washington, Ark.	92.3	1.9	83	828	216	(7)	--

- (1) Includes workers covered by Unemployment Insurance (UI) and Unemployment Compensation for Federal Employees (UCFE) programs.
(2) Data are preliminary.
(3) Average weekly wages were calculated using unrounded data.
(4) Percent changes were computed from quarterly employment and pay data adjusted for noneconomic county reclassifications.
(5) Ranking does not include the county of San Juan, Puerto Rico.
(6) Totals for the United States do not include data for Puerto Rico or the Virgin Islands.
(7) Data do not meet BLS or State agency disclosure standards.

Table 2. Covered (1) employment and wages in the United States and all counties in Arkansas, fourth quarter 2011 (2)

Area	Employment December 2011	Average Weekly Wage (3)	Area	Employment December 2011	Average Weekly Wage (3)
United States (4)	131,254,162	\$955	Lawrence	4,114	\$538
Arkansas	1,157,078	736	Lee	2,103	592
Arkansas	10,039	678	Lincoln	3,018	598
Ashley	8,063	739	Little River	3,932	784
Baxter	14,373	630	Logan	5,601	590
Benton	95,783	869	Lonoke	12,954	578
Boone	14,074	631	Madison	3,191	546
Bradley	3,461	568	Marion	3,618	520
Calhoun	2,622	958	Miller	13,569	684
Carroll	10,065	527	Mississippi	19,958	746
Chicot	3,441	556	Monroe	2,287	538
Clark	9,208	574	Montgomery	1,517	493
Clay	3,695	547	Nevada	2,338	581
Cleburne	7,198	600	Newton	1,138	442
Cleveland	1,070	483	Ouachita	7,503	588
Columbia	8,664	756	Perry	1,366	588
Conway	6,886	653	Phillips	6,351	551
Craighead	45,513	680	Pike	2,317	539
Crawford	19,512	625	Poinsett	5,110	618
Crittenden	15,670	640	Polk	6,048	511
Cross	5,164	593	Pope	26,511	665
Dallas	2,964	527	Prairie	1,433	575
Desha	4,672	613	Pulaski	246,478	869
Drew	6,583	544	Randolph	4,686	510
Faulkner	41,324	738	Saline	21,262	616
Franklin	4,504	669	Scott	3,050	521
Fulton	1,934	474	Searcy	1,618	456
Garland	35,763	612	Sebastian	65,791	735
Grant	3,768	579	Sevier	5,154	511
Greene	14,575	640	Sharp	3,631	470
Hempstead	8,652	686	St. Francis	8,246	614
Hot Spring	8,735	631	Stone	2,706	556
Howard	7,221	527	Union	17,488	798
Independence	14,938	640	Van Buren	3,861	609
Izard	3,182	533	Washington	92,295	828
Jackson	5,255	641	White	25,645	669
Jefferson	31,582	748	Woodruff	1,913	564
Johnson	8,895	543	Yell	6,485	516
Lafayette	1,364	582			

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

Table 3. Covered (1) employment and wages by state, fourth quarter 2011 (2)

State	Employment		Average weekly wage (3)			
	December 2011 (thousands)	Percent change, December 2010-11	Average weekly wage	National ranking by level	Percent change, fourth quarter 2010-11	National ranking by percent change
United States (4)	131,254.2	1.4	\$955	--	-1.7	--
Alabama	1,828.3	0.2	832	31	-0.8	14
Alaska	311.3	1.6	982	11	-0.5	10
Arizona	2,458.4	1.7	882	21	-1.1	17
Arkansas	1,157.1	0.9	736	47	-1.2	19
California	14,731.8	1.3	1,100	6	-2.7	47
Colorado	2,250.1	2.1	975	13	-2.6	46
Connecticut	1,642.0	0.9	1,188	4	-3.1	49
Delaware	405.9	0.4	984	10	-1.6	26
District of Columbia	708.0	1.3	1,668	1	-1.2	19
Florida	7,364.1	1.4	847	29	-2.8	48
Georgia	3,826.9	1.0	885	20	-2.2	39
Hawaii	607.0	1.4	845	30	-1.5	23
Idaho	606.4	0.8	717	50	-2.2	39
Illinois	5,635.9	1.1	1,013	8	-2.1	35
Indiana	2,799.2	2.0	789	41	-1.9	32
Iowa	1,464.2	1.1	793	40	-0.8	14
Kansas	1,320.1	0.7	800	38	-1.5	23
Kentucky	1,770.2	1.3	786	42	-1.0	16
Louisiana	1,870.8	1.0	850	27	-1.7	28
Maine	580.9	0.4	755	46	-1.8	30
Maryland	2,516.4	1.1	1,058	7	-2.0	33
Massachusetts	3,230.8	1.3	1,192	3	-2.1	35
Michigan	3,911.8	2.4	933	18	-0.5	10
Minnesota	2,636.4	2.1	936	16	-3.9	51
Mississippi	1,083.8	0.3	699	51	-1.1	17
Missouri	2,617.0	0.8	825	32	-1.7	28
Montana	426.7	1.8	727	48	0.7	4
Nebraska	910.5	0.8	762	45	-1.3	21
Nevada	1,124.1	0.8	852	26	-3.2	50
New Hampshire	615.4	0.9	971	15	-0.7	13
New Jersey	3,811.6	0.6	1,138	5	-2.1	35
New Mexico	784.3	-0.3	799	39	-2.2	39
New York	8,618.4	1.4	1,197	2	-1.8	30
North Carolina	3,885.9	1.3	824	33	-2.0	33
North Dakota	397.0	7.6	871	23	7.7	1
Ohio	5,027.6	1.3	855	25	-1.3	21
Oklahoma	1,530.0	1.3	817	34	2.6	2
Oregon	1,629.8	1.2	850	27	-0.2	6
Pennsylvania	5,595.1	0.7	936	16	-1.6	26
Rhode Island	451.9	0.1	919	19	-2.1	35
South Carolina	1,796.1	1.3	763	44	-1.5	23
South Dakota	397.0	1.5	724	49	1.4	3
Tennessee	2,654.9	2.1	858	24	-2.3	42
Texas	10,607.9	2.4	973	14	-0.3	8
Utah	1,202.8	2.8	806	37	-2.5	45
Vermont	303.9	1.3	809	36	-0.5	10
Virginia	3,625.0	1.3	1,004	9	-2.4	43
Washington	2,843.6	1.4	979	12	-0.2	6
West Virginia	714.0	2.2	776	43	-0.3	8
Wisconsin	2,689.6	0.7	817	34	-2.4	43
Wyoming	276.9	2.3	876	22	0.6	5
Puerto Rico	960.9	0.1	552	(5)	-1.1	(5)
Virgin Islands	43.2	-4.0	772	(5)	-3.4	(5)

(1) Includes workers covered by Unemployment Insurance (UI) and Unemployment Compensation for Federal Employees (UCFE) programs.

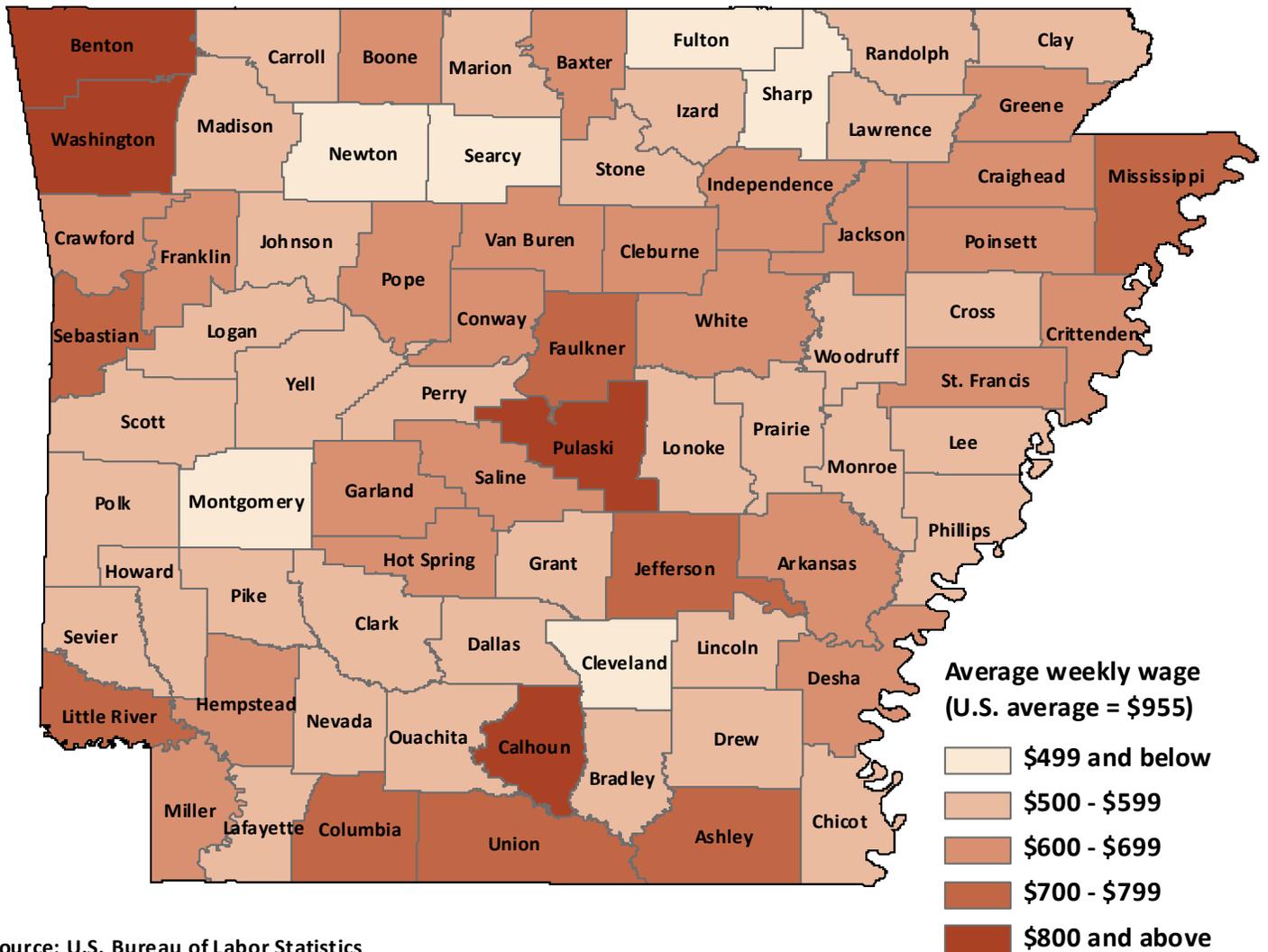
(2) Data are preliminary.

(3) Average weekly wages were calculated using unrounded data.

(4) Totals for the United States do not include data for Puerto Rico or the Virgin Islands.

(5) Data not included in the national ranking.

Chart 1. Average weekly wages by county in Arkansas, fourth quarter 2011



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics