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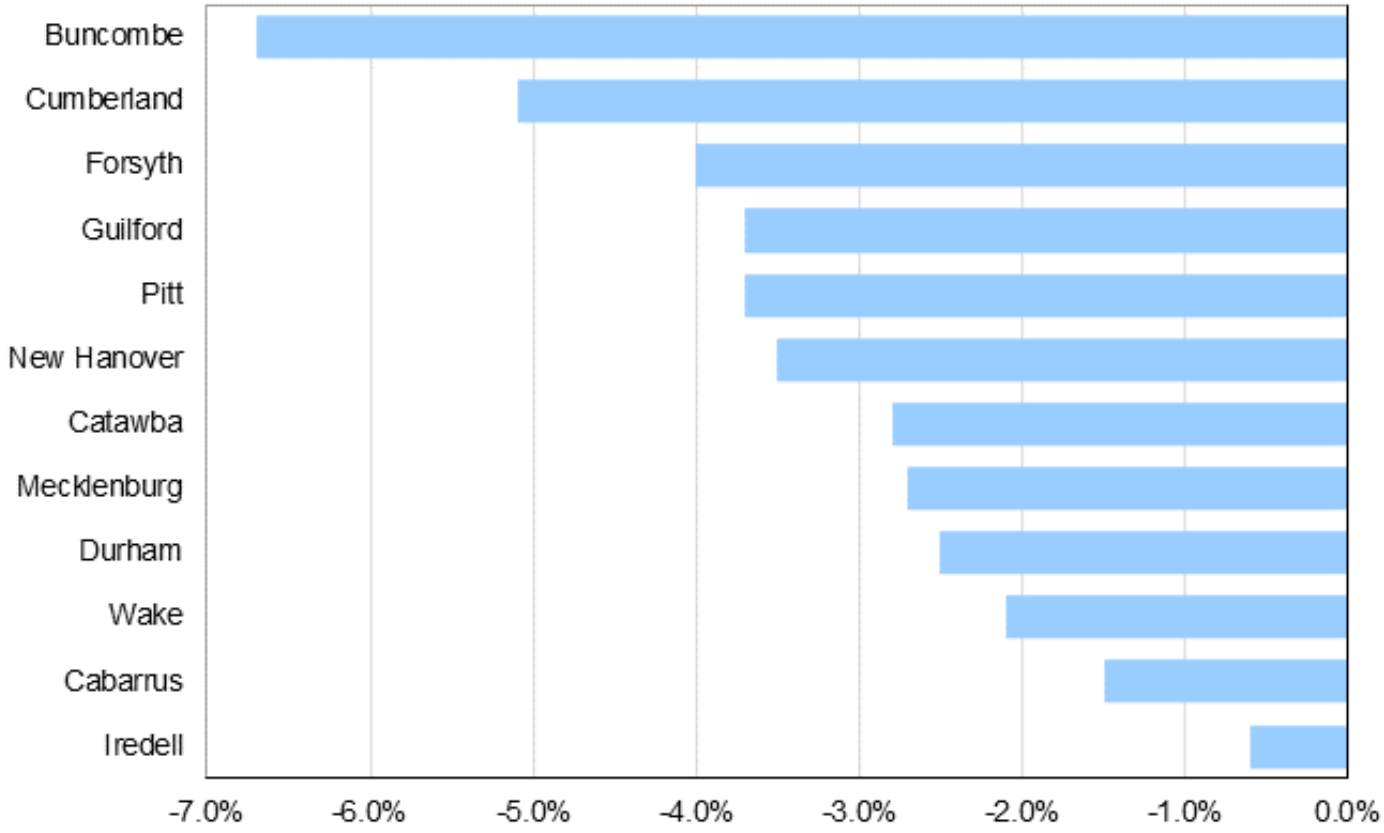
County Employment and Wages in North Carolina — Fourth Quarter 2020

Employment declined in all of North Carolina's 12 largest counties from December 2019 to December 2020, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported today. (Large counties are those with annual average employment levels of 75,000 or more in 2019.) Regional Commissioner Janet S. Rankin noted that employment decreases ranged from 6.7 percent in Buncombe County to 0.6 percent in Iredell County. (See chart 1 and table 1.)

Chart 1. Over-the-year percent change in covered employment among the largest counties in North Carolina, December 2020



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

National employment decreased 6.1 percent over the year, with 352 of the 357 largest U.S. counties reporting declines. Maui + Kalawao, HI, had the largest over-the-year decrease in employment with a loss of 22.8 percent. Utah, UT, experienced the largest over-the-year percentage increase in employment with a gain of 3.8 percent.

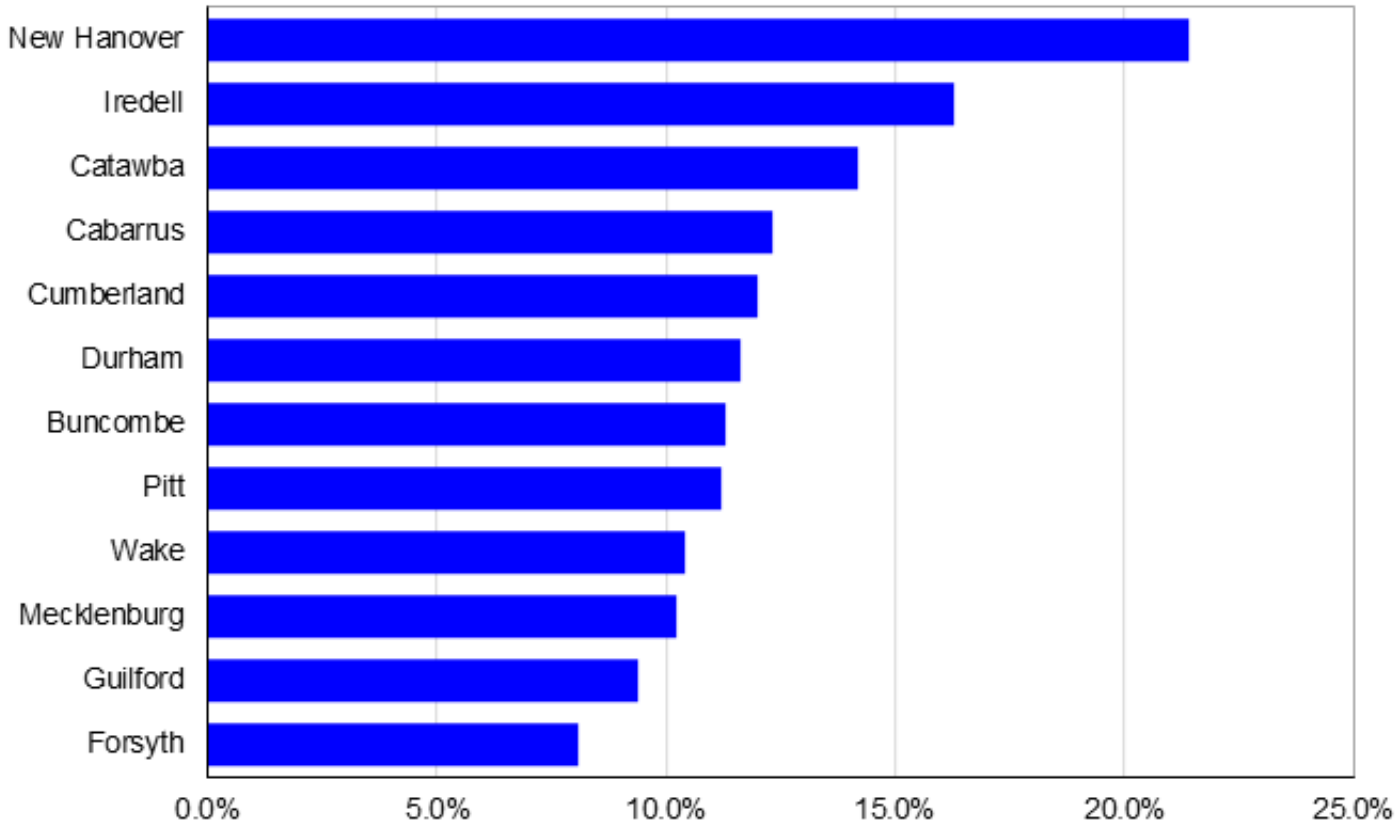
Among the 12 largest counties in North Carolina, employment was highest in Mecklenburg County (711,000) in December 2020. Within Mecklenburg County's private industry, finance and insurance accounted for the largest employment. Together, the 12 largest North Carolina counties accounted for 59.5 percent of total employment within the state. Nationwide, the 357 largest counties made up 73.1 percent of total U.S. employment.

Employment and wage levels (but not over-the-year changes) are also available for the 88 counties in North Carolina with employment below 75,000. Wage levels in all 88 smaller counties were below the national average in the fourth quarter of 2020. (See table 2.)

Large county wage changes

All 12 large North Carolina counties reported average weekly wage gains from the fourth quarter of 2019 to the fourth quarter of 2020. (See chart 2.) Three counties had rates of wage gains that were above the national rate of 13.0 percent. New Hanover County had the largest gain (+21.4 percent), followed by Iredell County (+16.3 percent) and Catawba County (+14.2 percent). Over-the-year wage gains among North Carolina's other nine large counties ranged from 12.3 percent to 8.1 percent.

Chart 2. Over-the-year percent change in covered average weekly wages among the largest counties in North Carolina, fourth quarter 2020



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Among the 357 largest counties in the United States, 356 had over-the-year wage increases. Nationally, across most industries, increases in average weekly wages reflect substantial employment declines combined with wage increases. The lowest paying industry, leisure and hospitality, had the largest employment loss, which

results in higher average weekly wages for the industry and the nation. San Francisco, CA, had the largest percentage wage increase (+44.3 percent). Ector, TX, had the only over-the-year percentage decrease (-7.5 percent).

Large county average weekly wages

Weekly wages in the 2 of the 12 largest counties in North Carolina were above the national average of $1,339 in the fourth quarter of 2020. Average weekly wages in Durham ($1,602, 33rd) and Mecklenburg ($1,453, 59th) ranked among the top 75 nationwide.

Among the largest U.S. counties, 89 reported average weekly wages above the U.S. average in the fourth quarter of 2020. Santa Clara, CA, had the highest average weekly wage at $3,690. Average weekly wages were below the national average in the remaining 268 counties. At $760 a week, Cameron, TX, had the lowest average weekly wage.

Average weekly wages in North Carolina's smaller counties

All 88 smaller counties in North Carolina—those with employment below 75,000—had average weekly wages below the national average of $1,339. Among these smaller counties, Orange had the highest average weekly wage at $1,335. Tyrrell County ($695) had the lowest average weekly wage in the state.

When all 100 counties in North Carolina were considered, 23 reported average weekly wages of $799 or lower, 46 registered wages from $800 to $899, 16 had wages from $900 to $999, 8 had wages from $1,000 to $1,099, and 7 had average weekly wages of $1,100 or higher. (See chart 3.)

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 2019 edition of this publication was published in September 2020. Tables and additional content from the 2019 edition of *Employment and Wages Annual Averages Online* are available at www.bls.gov/cew/publications/employment-and-wages-annual-averages/2019/home.htm. The 2020 edition of *Employment and Wages Annual Averages Online* will be available in September 2021.

The County Employment and Wages release for first quarter 2021 is scheduled to be released on Wednesday, August 18, 2021, at 10:00 a.m. (ET). The County Employment and Wages full data update for first quarter 2021 is scheduled to be released on Wednesday, September 1, 2021, at 10:00 a.m. (ET).

QCEW Imputation Issue Caused by Pandemic-Related Challenges

In the spring of 2020, BLS modified its imputation process for QCEW to be more responsive to current economic conditions. While continuing work to improve this process, BLS made an unintended data processing error. This error affected data for the second, third, and fourth quarters of 2020. BLS has analyzed this issue and has determined that the impact on QCEW employment was negligible at the statewide level. In smaller areas and industries, revisions may be larger than usual. Wage data were not affected. Following the usual QCEW practice, these data will be revised and corrected with the full data update on September 1, 2021.

For more information on QCEW imputation methodology, see www.bls.gov/cew/additional-resources/imputation-methodology.htm.

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 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 individuals with sensory impairments 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 12 largest counties in North Carolina, fourth quarter 2020

Area	Establishments, fourth quarter 2020 (thousands)	Employment			Average weekly wage [1]			
		December 2020 (thousands)	Percent change, December 2019–20 [2]	National ranking by percent change [3]	Fourth quarter 2020	National ranking by level [3]	Percent change, fourth quarter 2019–20 [2]	National ranking by percent change [3]
United States [4]	10,675.8	140,881.3	-6.1	--	$1,339	--	13.0	--
North Carolina	301.7	4,431.0	-2.7	--	1,152	29	11.2	39
Buncombe	10.4	126.9	-6.7	212	1,024	314	11.3	230
Cabarrus	5.3	77.7	-1.5	18	962	340	12.3	182
Catawba	4.6	86.2	-2.8	49	1,008	320	14.2	81
Cumberland	6.6	116.8	-5.1	134	970	335	12.0	195
Durham	9.2	216.0	-2.5	41	1,602	33	11.6	214
Forsyth	9.8	186.6	-4.0	83	1,131	224	8.1	330
Guilford	15.2	279.3	-3.7	71	1,089	257	9.4	309
Iredell	5.8	77.2	-0.6	9	1,140	215	16.3	34
Mecklenburg	42.0	711.0	-2.7	46	1,453	59	10.2	282
New Hanover	9.1	115.8	-3.5	65	1,133	220	21.4	5
Pitt	4.0	75.6	-3.7	71	1,016	317	11.2	233
Wake	39.4	567.4	-2.1	28	1,321	97	10.4	272

Footnotes:
(1) Average weekly wages were calculated using unrounded data.
(2) Percent changes were computed from 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 2020

Area	Employment December 2020	Average weekly wage(1)
United States(2)	140,881,253	$1,339
North Carolina	4,430,986	1,152
Alamance	61,121	967
Alexander	8,933	799
Alleghany	3,066	739
Anson	6,863	798
Ashe	7,174	826
Avery	6,576	779
Beaufort	15,761	839
Bertie	5,736	746
Bladen	13,422	779
Brunswick	33,178	886
Buncombe	126,935	1,024
Burke	28,941	844
Cabarrus	77,680	962
Caldwell	25,474	880
Camden	1,222	859
Carteret	22,706	814
Caswell	2,764	835
Catawba	86,249	1,008
Chatham	15,040	895
Cherokee	7,680	768
Chowan	4,659	881
Clay	1,985	737
Cleveland	34,527	905
Columbus	15,173	805
Craven	38,958	1,035
Cumberland	116,820	970
Currituck	6,344	796
Dare	16,549	815
Davidson	43,717	936
Davie	12,920	893
Duplin	18,496	815
Durham	215,987	1,602
Edgecombe	15,934	851
Forsyth	186,554	1,131
Franklin	12,035	1,007
Gaston	72,254	917
Gates	1,504	930
Graham	1,851	822
Granville	20,446	987
Greene	4,473	798
Guilford	279,284	1,089
Halifax	14,658	787
Harnett	25,422	814
Haywood	17,091	849
Henderson	39,773	915
Hertford	8,735	883
Hoke	8,607	790
Hyde	1,644	726
Iredell	77,218	1,140
Jackson	13,664	905
Johnston	52,624	921
Jones	1,608	788
Lee	25,044	929
Lenoir	28,318	886

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 2020 - Continued

Area	Employment December 2020	Average weekly wage(1)
Lincoln	24,574	937
McDowell	15,381	815
Macon	11,317	807
Madison	3,925	788
Martin	6,435	713
Mecklenburg	711,018	1,453
Mitchell	4,590	822
Montgomery	9,003	883
Moore	35,579	974
Nash	38,741	914
New Hanover	115,777	1,133
Northampton	5,502	824
Onslow	49,412	827
Orange	69,552	1,335
Pamlico	3,263	721
Pasquotank	14,806	879
Pender	12,906	815
Perquimans	2,200	768
Person	9,455	887
Pitt	75,641	1,016
Polk	4,978	750
Randolph	43,169	854
Richmond	13,338	801
Robeson	37,764	819
Rockingham	23,867	791
Rowan	47,353	1,005
Rutherford	17,859	801
Sampson	17,371	849
Scotland	11,181	876
Stanly	18,652	831
Stokes	7,620	733
Surry	27,452	863
Swain	9,585	841
Transylvania	8,888	832
Tyrrell	973	695
Union	63,977	1,016
Vance	13,599	831
Wake	567,432	1,321
Warren	2,991	748
Washington	3,093	857
Watauga	23,357	822
Wayne	40,557	876
Wilkes	20,247	831
Wilson	36,232	965
Yadkin	9,633	840
Yancey	4,215	849

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 2020

State	Establishments, fourth quarter 2020 (thousands)	Employment		Average weekly wage [1]			
		December 2020 (thousands)	Percent change, December 2019–20	Fourth quarter 2020	National ranking by level	Percent change, fourth quarter 2019–20	National ranking by percent change
United States [2]	10,675.8	140,881.3	-6.1	$1,339	--	13.0	--
Alabama	134.6	1,951.2	-2.9	1,096	35	11.4	36
Alaska	23.1	290.1	-6.4	1,260	17	10.6	44
Arizona	173.9	2,908.7	-3.3	1,214	22	14.6	9
Arkansas	94.6	1,194.8	-3.2	999	49	11.4	36
California	1,660.2	16,380.1	-8.3	1,724	3	18.5	1
Colorado	219.6	2,613.7	-5.7	1,378	10	12.3	25
Connecticut	126.8	1,578.4	-6.5	1,551	6	12.2	27
Delaware	35.1	432.9	-5.2	1,262	16	11.3	38
District of Columbia	43.8	713.0	-8.9	2,293	1	15.2	6
Florida	765.4	8,642.8	-5.0	1,180	24	13.1	17
Georgia	319.7	4,405.9	-4.0	1,208	23	10.9	42
Hawaii	47.3	561.1	-16.1	1,219	21	16.0	4
Idaho	71.8	763.5	0.8	1,034	47	12.8	21
Illinois	386.3	5,573.8	-7.8	1,378	10	13.0	18
Indiana	173.1	2,985.1	-4.0	1,076	39	11.2	39
Iowa	105.6	1,494.3	-4.3	1,099	34	11.6	32
Kansas	89.9	1,346.9	-4.5	1,070	40	11.5	34
Kentucky	130.4	1,839.6	-4.8	1,057	42	10.8	43
Louisiana	140.8	1,796.9	-7.0	1,078	38	8.6	48
Maine	55.4	594.3	-4.3	1,092	36	14.5	10
Maryland	174.5	2,546.1	-6.7	1,445	8	13.6	16
Massachusetts	266.7	3,365.8	-8.3	1,766	2	17.0	3
Michigan	265.3	3,998.2	-8.9	1,257	19	12.8	21
Minnesota	186.4	2,684.1	-7.9	1,322	13	12.3	25
Mississippi	76.1	1,119.1	-2.4	901	51	10.4	45
Missouri	221.5	2,724.4	-4.3	1,127	33	11.6	32
Montana	54.6	467.4	-1.4	1,035	45	12.7	23
Nebraska	72.5	962.7	-2.9	1,079	37	11.5	34
Nevada	90.2	1,283.1	-10.7	1,178	25	14.4	11
New Hampshire	57.1	637.3	-5.2	1,406	9	17.9	2
New Jersey	291.0	3,860.5	-7.2	1,517	7	13.9	15
New Mexico	64.8	767.1	-9.5	1,052	43	11.8	29
New York	662.4	8,693.4	-10.3	1,712	4	14.2	13
North Carolina	301.7	4,431.0	-2.7	1,152	29	11.2	39
North Dakota	32.6	394.4	-7.1	1,136	31	4.7	50
Ohio	307.3	5,199.9	-5.1	1,161	27	12.0	28
Oklahoma	113.6	1,569.1	-4.4	1,013	48	7.3	49
Oregon	167.3	1,824.3	-7.5	1,256	20	14.2	13
Pennsylvania	370.5	5,549.4	-7.4	1,287	15	12.6	24
Rhode Island	40.7	449.6	-8.3	1,259	18	14.7	7
South Carolina	149.2	2,074.4	-3.5	1,035	45	11.1	41
South Dakota	35.5	422.8	-1.9	1,048	44	14.4	11
Tennessee	176.2	3,002.5	-2.7	1,172	26	11.7	30
Texas	743.1	12,251.1	-4.3	1,294	14	9.0	47
Utah	117.9	1,557.8	0.6	1,154	28	12.9	20
Vermont	26.6	286.1	-8.9	1,133	32	14.7	7
Virginia	289.8	3,796.1	-4.7	1,360	12	13.0	18
Washington	259.7	3,219.7	-6.8	1,589	5	16.0	4
West Virginia	51.9	654.1	-5.3	997	50	10.3	46
Wisconsin	184.2	2,762.5	-4.8	1,140	30	11.7	30
Wyoming	27.7	260.2	-5.3	1,061	41	4.6	51
Puerto Rico	46.0	873.8	-4.0	621	[3]	8.0	[3]

Note: See footnotes at end of table.

Table 3. Covered employment and wages by state, fourth quarter 2020 - Continued

State	Establishments, fourth quarter 2020 (thousands)	Employment		Average weekly wage [1]			
		December 2020 (thousands)	Percent change, December 2019–20	Fourth quarter 2020	National ranking by level	Percent change, fourth quarter 2019–20	National ranking by percent change
Virgin Islands	3.5	35.3	-11.5	1,057	[3]	-1.3	[3]

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.

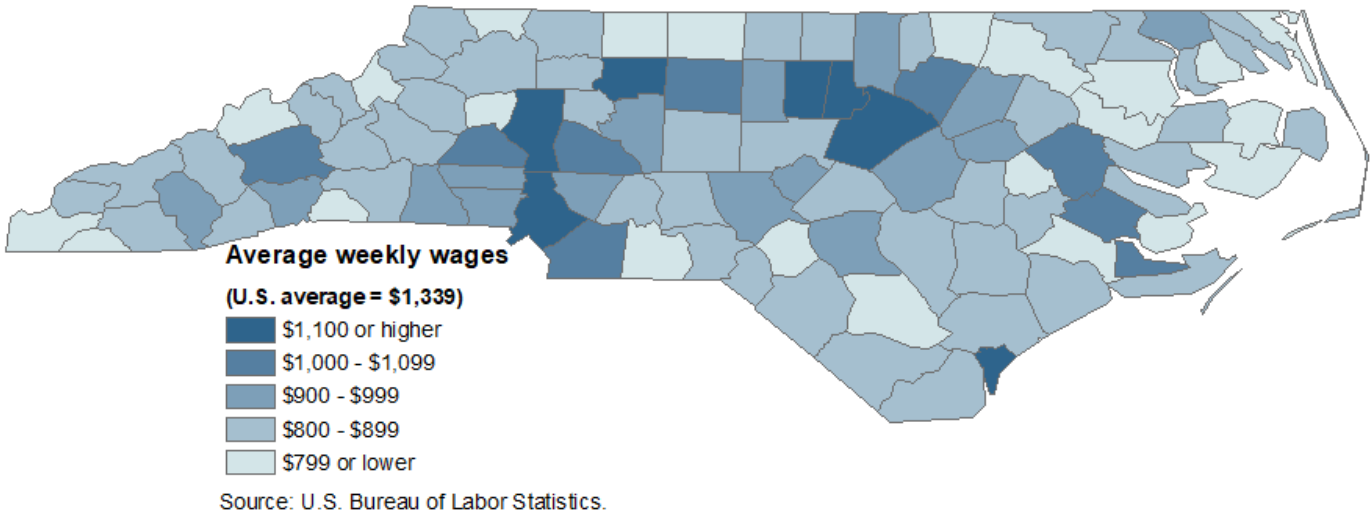



Chart 3. Average weekly wages by county in North Carolina, fourth quarter 2020