Crawford County

2025 WORKFORCE PROFILE







State Narrative for County Profiles

Wisconsin's labor market experienced a strong year in 2024. Employment reached record levels, inflation appeared on the wane, and interest rates are accommodating a largely reconstrued supply chain. In addition, real wages turned positive, and consumer spending was robust.

The primary challenge still facing the future economic construct is the labor quantity challenge and its broader economic impacts.

Wisconsin Jobs

The 2024 employment picture was favorable for Wisconsin, reaching new records in December at 3,076,500. The state's low unemployment rates were also noteworthy registering 3.0% or below the entire year. Although setting new records is always a good sign, new highs in employment would be expected through new expansionary economic periods.

Total non-farm employment also reached new highs, climbing through the year to peak in August at a seasonally adjusted basis of 3,048,000 and consolidating high levels through the remainder of the year, ending in December at 3,042,100. That marks a 1.6% increase over the pre-pandemic highs set in December 2019.



Figure 1: Wisconsin employment and jobs.

Economy

Wisconsin Gross Domestic Product (WGDP) reached new highs in nominal and real dollar terms in 2024¹, at \$456 billion or \$357 billion in real 2017 dollars. After a slower recovery coming out of the COVID-19 recession, Wisconsin's GDP growth rate has mimicked that of the country.



Figure 2: GDP growth index (2019Q1 = 100).

Many industry sectors were vibrant. Construction industry jobs hit new records, surpassing 140,000. Healthcare jobs also set new highs at 324,200. The leisure and hospitality sector recovered almost all the nearly 50% loss of jobs experienced during the COVID-19 recession, finishing with 285,200 jobs. Manufacturing jobs rose above 2023 levels to 481,200, but have not yet returned to pre-Covid19 levels.

Wisconsin ranks first in the number of manufacturing jobs per government job and second in manufacturing jobs share of total jobs. However, state-level manufacturing output was relatively weak against overall economic output. Two of the state's primary manufacturing industries, fabricated metal and machinery manufacturing, lost jobs through 2024. Fabricated metal manufacturing jobs peaked in July 2019, before the COVID-19 recession at 79,400 jobs, and ended 2024 with 74,300. Machinery manufacturing peaked in early 2023 with 68,800 jobs and finished 2024 with 67,200.

¹Third quarter 2024 is latest data available.





Figure 3: Wisconsin all industry v manufacturing growth (2019Q1 = 100).

While the durable goods manufacturing sector saw declines, non-durable goods manufacturing in Wisconsin has made headway. Jobs in the non-durables industries have increased since the pre-Covid high of 198,600 in July of 2019, to 201,000 in December 2024. Most of that has occurred in the food processing industry.

Labor Quantity Challenges

Employers continue to express challenges finding workers. This situation is being felt in all industries and most occupations – locally, regionally, and globally. Even China is experiencing population and workforce declines. Industries that are showing steady job growth, such as construction and healthcare, are limited by the number of workers available for positions.

As noted in studies dating back to 2000, there are not sufficient numbers of young workers to fill the jobs being vacated by the generation of baby boomers and the increased demand for workers associated with economic growth. The number of workers entering the labor market is essentially the same as the boomers exiting. A growing economy necessitates an increasing labor force or at least a more productive one. Wisconsin's labor force growth has remained close to zero.

The new high in Wisconsin's labor force reached in December 2024 of 3,170,300 is only 0.63% above the previous high in July 2017 and only 0.83% above the peak before that in June of 2009. That amounts to an annual average labor force growth rate of 0.08% per year, or about zero over 15 years.





Figure 4: Wisconsin labor force.

This shift has long been anticipated and is well documented. The front edge of the baby boomers turned 63 years old in 2009. By 2024, the back edge of the boomers (those born in 1964) were 60 years old. And while the labor force participation rates of workers 65 and older has increased since the 1990s, the remaining tenure of the boomers is short.



Figure 5: US labor force participation rate.

Below is a graph of Wisconsin's population and labor force projected out to 2040 based on the latest information from the Wisconsin Department of Administration Demographic Services. On a decennial basis, Wisconsin's population has already peaked. This suggests that the workforce will not experience substantial growth moving forward.





Figure 6: Wisconsin population and workforce projections.

While the overall situation has been realized for some time, the actual quantity of the shortfall has been undetermined until now. Staff at the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development's Office of Economic Advisors estimate that by 2031, the state could face a labor shortage exceeding 241,000 workers. (See Labor Supply Projections for Wisconsin 2020 – 2040, Winters, Kaur, and Otis, Labor Supply Projections for Wisconsin).

New Construct

Human resource constraints affect the entire economic construct. As one of the three primary components of economic inputs – along with natural resources and capital – a compromise in the abundance of labor permeates the economy. Having never encountered a labor constraint before, it needs to be noted – old models and old policies do not apply.

Moreover, the labor quantity challenge is a macroeconomic phenomenon. It cannot be remedied with microeconomic solutions. Microeconomic attraction and retention incentives of higher wages, better benefits, early exposure, and more are, at best, short-term and limited symptom remedies.

Jobs will go unfilled. Macroeconomic solutions to the challenge include:

- 1. A workable immigration policy
- 2. Reducing barriers to employment (see 2023 Wisconsin County Profiles)
- 3. Expanding trade
- 4. Technology infusion

Altering a fundamental input of the macroeconomic construct will impact all sectors. The limited and shifting human resource segment will alter income streams, change demand for goods and services, and affect the provision of public goods and services.



Wisconsin's economic health and vigor has been illustrated in the employment and jobs data. However, record low unemployment rates signify two usually unassociated yet coupled performance indicators. On the one hand, low unemployment rates indicate an engaged labor force – a relatively large numerator. On the other hand, in today's environment, low unemployment rates indicate a scarce labor force – a relatively small denominator.

This is an unprecedented situation – and it is not likely to resolve itself quickly.

Yet to be explored are how the limited labor pool and aging population effects other critical economic drivers, such as personal income, as a significant portion of the population (Baby Boomers) shifts to transfer payments that are fixed in real dollar terms, housing stock, dependency ratios, and fiscal balances.

One major unknown on the horizon are the effects that Artificial Intelligence (AI) will have on the future of economic and workforce development. The Governor's Task Force on Workforce and Artificial Intelligence Advisory Action Plan (dwd.wisconsin.gov/ai-taskforce/pdf/ai-advisory-action-plan.pdf) outlines some of the expected effects of AI. For example, the chart below sheds some light on the extent that occupations may be affected by AI.

Office and Admin. Support Pro		Proc	luction	Tra M	Transportation and Material Moving		-1.00		
Sales and Related	Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Business and Financial Operations		Healthca Suppor	are t Buildi	e Management		ment	-0.67 -0.33 0.00	
			Installation, Maintenance and Repair	Grour Clean and Mainten	ing ance ure P	Cor a Math ersonal	nputer and matical	0.33 0.67 1.00	
Food Prep. and Serving Related	Edu Ins and	icational truction I Library	Construction and Extraction	Engineer Protecti Servic	ing ve e	are and Service	Life, Physical and Social Science		

Figure 7: AI exposure per occupation group by number employed.

Fundamental changes are in store for Wisconsin's economy due primarily to two new influencers: workforce constraints and artificial intelligence technology. The degree to how each will affect the other and the whole is yet to be determined.



	2020 Census	2023 Final Estimate	Numeric Change	Percent Change
Prairie du Chien, City	5,506	5,488	-18	-0.3%
Clayton, Town	1,052	1,051	-1	-0.1%
Bridgeport, Town	988	1,018	30	3.0%
Prairie du Chien, Town	957	949	-8	-0.8%
Seneca, Town	932	936	4	0.4%
Freeman, Town	727	739	12	1.6%
Eastman, Town	731	734	3	0.4%
Utica, Town	623	624	1	0.2%
Wauzeka, Village	628	617	-11	-1.8%
Soldiers Grove, Village	552	557	5	0.9%
Crawford, County	16,113	16,151	38	0.2%
Wisconsin, State	5,893,718	5,951,400	57,682	1.0%

Population and Demographics

Crawford County is the 61st most populous county in Wisconsin, with 16,151 residents. It ranks as the 33rd fastest-growing county in the state, with a 0.2% population increase from 2020 to 2023, compared to a statewide growth of 1.0%.





The largest city, Prairie du Chien, had an estimated population of 5,488 in 2023. Locals often joke that the population seems to double during the summer due to tourism. Attractions include apple orchards, Mississippi River cruises, historical sites, and outdoor recreational events. Nearby cities in Iowa, such as Marquette and McGregor, are closely tied to Prairie Du Chien's tourism and economic activity. Outside of Prairie Du Chien, municipalities in Crawford County have populations of around 1,000 or fewer.

From 2020 to 2023, Crawford County experienced a natural population decline of 103 individuals (-0.6%,) ranking 41st in the state. However, net migration was positive, with 141 new residents



(+0.9%), ranking 38th statewide. The overall population increase of 38 people reflects these combined factors. An aging population is a primary reason for the negative natural increase.

Population Projections

	2020	2030	2040	2050	2020-2050 Population Change
Crawford	16,113	14,750	13,345	11,940	-25.9%
Wisconsin	5,893,718	5,890,915	5,841,620	5,710,120	-3.1%

Source: Demographic Services Center, Wisconsin Department of Administration.

Crawford County is projected to have a significant decrease in population from 2020 to 2050, going from 16,113 in 2020 to 11,940 in 2050. Considering the numerous variables that influence these estimates, which can fluctuate rapidly or evolve over time, it's crucial to highlight that these figures are merely projections. However, based on current and expected trends in natural increase and net migration, Crawford County will likely see a decrease in population over the next few decades.



Employment by Industry

	2023 Avg Monthly Employment	5-year Change	5-year % Change	% of Total Employment
Total, All Industries	6,580	-821	-11.1%	100.0%
Trade, Transportation, and Utilities	1,754	-89	-4.8%	26.7%
Education and Health Services	1,410	-72	-4.9%	21.4%
Manufacturing	1,119	-582	-34.2%	17.0%
Leisure and Hospitality	785	50	6.8%	11.9%
Professional and Business Services	456	-73	-13.8%	6.9%
Public Administration	422	-12	-2.8%	6.4%
Financial Activities	174	22	14.5%	2.6%
Natural Resources and Mining	154	-38	-19.8%	2.3%
Construction	135	-8	-5.6%	2.1%
Other Services	99	-9	-8.3%	1.5%
Information	73	-8	-9.9%	1.1%

Source: Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Between 2018 and 2023, Crawford County lost 821 jobs (-11.1%), with average employment levels at 6,580 jobs in 2023. Despite these loses, some industries saw growth. Financial activities increased by 14.5% (+22 jobs), and leisure and hospitality increased by 6.8% (+50 jobs). Looking at the five-year numeric change, Crawford County has not yet returned to pre-pandemic employment levels. Trade, transportation, and utilities remained the largest industry in the county, accounting for an average of 1,754 employees in 2023, or 26.7% of total employment. The largest numeric decline between 2018 and 2023 occurred in manufacturing, which lost 582 jobs (-34.2%). Within manufacturing, the nonmetallic mineral product subsector saw a decrease of 133 jobs between 2018 and 2020 (data between 2021 and 2023 unavailable), while the wood product subsector lost 67 jobs over the five-year period.



Unemployment

Crawford County's average monthly unemployment rate in 2023 was 3.9%, higher than the state average of 3.0%, ranking 60th among Wisconsin's counties. Seasonal unemployment continues to significantly impact the county, with higher unemployment rates observed between November and February. Industries such as construction, natural resources and mining, and leisure and hospitality are particularly affected during colder months. Similarly, education and health services experience employment declines during the summer months.

Despite these seasonal fluctuations, Crawford County's average unemployment has steadily decreased since the pandemic, falling from 7.5% in 2020 to 3.9% in 2023. While a tight labor market – characterized by more job openings than available workers - is generally favorable for job seekers, it poses challenges for employers striving to maintain and grow their businesses.

i Unemployment Rate

The unemployment rate is the percentage of people who are not working but actively looking for work compared to the total number of people in the labor force.





Labor Force Participation

Crawford County's labor force participation rate (LFPR) dropped from a rate of 69.9% in 2009 to 61.2% in 2010. Since 2012, the LFPR has steadily declined, reaching 54.3% in 2023. This downward trend is not unique to Crawford County but reflects a broader county, state, and national trend associated with an aging population exiting the labor market. Baby boomers, in particular, are retiring in large numbers, contributing to this decline.

i Labor Force Participation Rate

The labor force participation rate (LFPR) looks at the relative labor resources available and is expressed as the percentage of the civilian noninstitutional population 16 years and older that is working or actively looking for work.



Figure 10: Source: WI Department of Workforce Development Office of Economic Advisors.



Al Impact

Occupation	Employment	% of Total Employment	Al Exposure Index
Cashiers	4,230	3.1%	0.89
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	4,230	3.1%	-0.09
Registered Nurses	3,780	2.7%	0.04
Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers,	3,680	2.7%	-0.78
Hand			
Fast Food and Counter Workers	3,220	2.3%	-1.00
Retail Salespersons	2,860	2.1%	0.40
Stockers and Order Fillers	2,560	1.9%	-0.05
Office Clerks, General	2,270	1.6%	1.00
Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	2,150	1.6%	-1.27
Customer Service Representatives	2,010	1.5%	0.75

Source: Governor's Task Force on Workforce and Artificial Intelligence.

i Al Exposure

Al exposure, as computed by the Governor's Task Force on Workforce and Artificial Intelligence, is the median value across four different research paper's measures of exposure after normalizing each paper's measure to the same mean and variance. A positive value of Al exposure indicates placement in the top 50% of occupations for Al exposure, with higher values indicating greater exposure to Al. Conversely, negative numbers indicate exposure in the bottom 50%. For more information about Al exposure, refer to The Governor's Task Force on Workforce and Artificial Intelligence Advisory Action Plan (dwd.wisconsin.gov/ai-taskforce/pdf/ai-advisory-action-plan.pdf)

In the Western Workforce Development Area (WDA), which includes Buffalo, Crawford, Jackson, Juneau, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau, and Vernon counties, the largest occupation is cashiers, accounting for 3.1% of the area's employment. This occupation has an artificial intelligence exposure index of 0.89. For comparison, the occupation with the highest potential AI exposure is bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks, with an AI exposure index of 1.89.

Manual occupations, such as laborers and janitors, tend to have lower AI exposure indexes (0.78 and -1.27, respectively). In contrast, office-based roles like cashiers and customer service representatives have higher AI exposure indexes, reflecting a greater likelihood of being impacted by AI adoption. Given the emerging nature of AI and its limited current adoption across industries, the long-term effects on occupations and the economy remain uncertain.



	Industry	2022 Employment	2032 Projected Employment	Employment Change 2022-2032	% Change 2022-2032
Most Jobs Added	Trade, Transportation, and Utilities	30,377	33,791	3,414	11.24%
Highest Number Employed	Education and Health Services	37,865	40,773	2,908	7.68%
Highest Percent Growth	Leisure and Hospitality	12,616	14,521	1,905	15.10%
Lowest Percent Growth	Government	12,345	12,735	390	3.16%
Total	Total All Industries	159,570	173,359	13,789	8.64%

Industry Employment Projections

Source: WI Department of Workforce Development Office of Economic Advisors.

DWD produces employment projections for Wisconsin's 11 WDAs every two years. Employment in the Western WDA is projected to grow by 13,789 (8.6%) between 2022 and 2032, slightly outpacing the state's overall rate of 7.1%.

Industries are categorized as either goods-producing industries (e.g., manufacturing, construction, and natural resources and mining) or service-producing industries (e.g., trade, transportation, utilities, education, health services, and leisure and hospitality). Goods-producing industries are expected to see modest growth of 6.1% over the decade, while service-producing industries are projected to grow by 9.4%.

During the pandemic, demand shifted dramatically from services to goods, contributing to rapid inflation. As the economy continues to recover, the service industry is expected to grow significantly.

For more information and detailed projections results for both occupations and industries, view WisConomy's projections page (jobcenterofwisconsin.com/wisconomy/pub/projections).



	Occupation	2022 Employment	2032 Projected Employment	Employment Change 2022-2032	% Change 2022-2032
Highest Percent Growth	Computer and Mathematical	2,543	2,903	360	14.2%
Lowest Percent Growth	Office and Administrative Support	17,927	18,189	262	1.5%
Highest Number Employed	Transportation and Material Moving	18,291	20,662	2,371	13.0%
Most Jobs Added	Transportation and Material Moving	18,291	20,662	2,371	13.0%
Total	Total, All	159,570	173,359	13,789	8.6%

Occupation Employment Projections

Source: WI Department of Workforce Development Office of Economic Advisors.

In the Western WDA, employment is projected to grow by 13,789 jobs between 2022 and 2032, translating to an average annual increase of approximately 1,379 jobs in the region. However, annual growth is just one component of total yearly job openings. The other two components include labor force exits (e.g., retirements) and occupational transfers (people switching to different roles). Strategies to address job openings will vary depending on the combination of these factors for each occupation.

For example, the occupation of heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers illustrates the dynamics of job openings. This role is expected to have 546 annual openings for western Wisconsin, but only 56 of these openings stem from expected employment growth. The remaining 493 openings are from estimated labor force exits or occupation transfers. Addressing these openings may require strategies beyond simply hiring new workers, such as incentivizing current workers to stay in their occupations longer.



Aging Population



Figure 11: US Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program and WI Department of Administration, Demographic Services Center.

The selected age groups (under 25, 25-54, and over 55) represent three broad life stages, each with unique societal needs and impacts. Individuals under 25 are typically pursuing education or exploring early career options. The 25-54 age group represent the prime working years, often associated with career advancement and family formation. Those aged individuals aged 55 and older are more likely to transition from the workforce to retirement.

In 2023, individuals aged 55 and older comprised 41.4% of Crawford County's population, up from 35.0% in 2013. From 2017 to 2022, the county's median age was 47.2, significantly higher than Wisconsin's median age of 39.9, according to the Census Bureau's American Community Survey. The population aged 55 and older grew from 4,519 in 2000 to 6,595 in 2023 contributing to a decline in the labor force participation rate. Meanwhile, the population under 55 (including the 25-54 and under-25 age groups) has steadily decreased during this time.

This aging trend is not unique to Crawford County but reflects broader state and national patterns. A rapidly aging population impacts communities by reducing the labor force, increasing demand for health care, and raising the number of individuals relying on transfer payments. These demographic shifts present challenges and opportunities for policy and workforce planning. Between the years of 2024 and 2030, the population of 55 years and over is projected to start decreasing for Crawford County.



Personal Income



Figure 12: Source: United States Bureau of Economic Analysis.

i Personal Income

Personal income includes income from all sources, such as wages, business income, rental income, investments, and government transfer payments. It excludes capital gains or losses, whether realized or unrealized. All dollar amounts are adjusted for inflation using 2023 dollars.

The per capita personal income (PCPI) in Crawford County was \$52,822 in 2022, compared to the statewide average of \$63,996. While these figures are adjusted for inflation, they do not account for differences in cost of living across regions.

In 2022, 28.1% of PCPI came from transfer payments rather than earned income. The steady increase in the share of transfer payments is likely tied to the county's aging population. As residents age, many become eligible for Social Security benefits, which contribute significantly to transfer payments. Similar increases were observed during the 2008-2009 recession and the 2020 pandemic, when Unemployment Insurance and stimulus payments played a key role in stabilizing the economy.



Workforce Pipeline



Figure 13: Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

Education plays a vital role in preparing the next generation of the labor force. As of the 2023-24 school year, 680 students were enrolled in grades 9-12 across public, private, and home-based schools. It is important to note that school district boundaries can extend into multiple counties, meaning that county-level enrollment figures may not precisely reflect the number of students residing within the county. Enrollment counts are based on the location of the school district's main office.

As Crawford County's population continues to decline and age, high school enrollment has followed a similar downward trend over recent years. With a shrinking workforce, the quality of education and training becomes increasingly critical to meet the county's economic needs and ensure a skilled labor force.







Career and Technical Education

Among students in grades 11-12, 62.1% were enrolled as concentrators in career and technical education (CTE) during the 2022-23 school year, compared to 44.3% statewide. The career pathway with the largest number of participants was agriculture, food, and natural resources, which had 128 students. Architecture and construction followed as the second most popular pathway, with 27 concentrators.

1	Career and	lechnical Education	

Career and technical education (CTE) equips students for both the workforce and postsecondary education through work-based learning opportunities. CTE concentrators are 11th and 12th graders who have passed at least two CTE courses within a specific career pathway. Home-based students are not included in this data.

	CTE Concentrator	Percent of Grade 11 and 12
Crawford	242	62.1%
Wisconsin	64,124	44.3%

School year 2022-23. Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.





Figure 15: School year 2022-23. Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

Postsecondary Enrollment

In the 2022-23 school year, 47.2% of high school graduates in Crawford County enrolled in a postsecondary school, compared to 43.6% statewide. This includes enrollment in public and private colleges, universities, and technical schools.

i Postsecondary Enrollment

Postsecondary enrollment tracks the percentage of high school graduates who attend a postsecondary school (public or private colleges, two- or four-year universities, technical colleges, or training programs) in the fall immediately following graduation. It is important to note that this data may slightly underrepresent actual enrollment due to limitations in how information is matched within the National Student Clearinghouse.

	Postsecondary Enrollment	Percent of Grade 12
Crawford	91	47.2%
Wisconsin	31,893	43.6%

School year 2022-23. Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

Youth Apprenticeship

Youth apprenticeship programs provide students with hands-on experience to prepare them for the workforce. In the 2022-23 school year, 30 students in Crawford County participated in youth apprenticeship opportunities, gaining valuable skills and practical training.



i Youth Apprenticeship

Youth Apprenticeship (YA) Program is a school-supervised program that combines work and classroom learning to help high school students prepare for a career. Participants receive on-the-job training directly from the employer. The program helps students explore career paths and helps employers develop a qualified workforce.

	Youth Apprenticeship Participants	Percent of Grade 11 and 12
Crawford	30	7.7%
Wisconsin	8,222	5.7%

School year 2022-23. Source: Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development.

