

Introduction

This edition of Kevin's Corner reviews changes in the size of the labor force in each of Vermont's 14 counties. County-level labor force data was first produced in 1990.

Sources

Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) is a program of the Economic & Labor Market Information Division in cooperation with our federal partners at the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics. LAUS incorporates data from the Current Population Survey (CPS), Vermont's Unemployment Insurance program, and Current Employment Statistics to generate monthly estimates of the number of Vermonters employed and unemployed (combined, the labor force).

Note: This edition of Kevin's Corner updates three regionally-based labor force comparisons from this time last year. Benchmarking and updated input data have shifted figures, especially after 2010. The time periods measured are slightly incongruous in order to maintain similar timeframes while minimizing the impact of the 2020 pandemic from decennial comparisons.

Statewide changes in Vermont's Labor Force

The labor force is defined as the sum of the number of employed Vermonters and the number of unemployed Vermonters. To meet the definition of *unemployed* a Vermonter must not be working, must be willing and able to work, and must have actively sought work in the past 4 weeks. Labor force data is based on the person's place of residence, not their place of work. Therefore a person residing in Addison and working in Chittenden, for example, is included in Addison's labor market. Similarly, a person living in Vermont and working in New Hampshire is counted among Vermont's labor force.

Between 1990 and 2024 Vermont's labor force grew by 50,222 or 16.4%. This growth, however, was not steady. After growing by 31,498 (10.3%) in the 1990s and 22,313 (6.6%) in the 2000s, the labor force actually contracted by 1.8% (-6,623) between 2009 and 2019. It has since expanded by 0.9% or 3,034 people.

Table 1: Statewide Change in Labor Force

Year	Labor Force	Change From Previous	% Change
1990	305,688	NA	NA
1999	337,186	31,498	10.3%
2009	359,499	22,313	6.6%
2019	352,876	-6,623	-1.8%
2024	355,910	3,034	0.9%
1990-2024	NA	50,222	16.4%

Demographics play an important part in determining labor force dynamics. At least some part of Vermont's recent labor force decline can be explained by the share of the population over the age of 65. In 2009 15.6% of Vermonters were 65+. By 2019 that figure had increased to 22.1%, reflecting the state's aging trend.

Labor Force Changes in Vermont's Fourteen Counties

The growth has also been incongruous across Vermont's 14 counties. Some counties have seen significant growth (Lamoille, +45.2%; Grand Isle, +44.8%). Other counties have a smaller labor force today than they did in 1990 (Rutland, -7.3%; Bennington, -2.7%). In this section we review labor force changes across Vermont's 14 counties.

Note: Counties are reviewed in order from the highest rate of labor force growth to the lowest rate between 1990 and 2024.

Lamoille County

Between 1990 and 2024, no county's labor force increased as rapidly as Lamoille, which expanded by 45.2% (4,800 persons). The majority of that growth occurred between 1999 and 2009 when the labor force grew by 3,671 or 30.6%. 2009's 15,677 marked the peak of the county's labor force. It declined by 3.8% (-603) over the next decade. While it has begun to grow again, 2024's labor force of 15,412 remains 1.7% smaller than at its 2009 peak of 15,677.

Table 2: Lamoille County Labor Force Growth

Year	Labor Force	Change From Previous	% Change
1990	10,612	NA	NA
1999	12,006	1,394	13.1%
2009	15,677	3,671	30.6%
2019	15,074	-603	-3.8%
2024	15,412	338	2.2%
1990-2024	NA	4,800	45.2%

Grand Isle County

At a rate of 44.8%, Grand Isle has been the second fastest growing county over the past 34 years. Its fastest growth was between 1990 and 1999 (24.4% or +687), though its largest numeric growth was in the next period, 1999 – 2009 (+751 or 21.4%). The labor force peaked in 2006 at 4,285 and began a decline in 2007. Between 2009 and 2019 it declined by 6.2% (-262). Since then it has grown slightly (+88 or 2.2%). Its 2024 annual average labor force stood at 4,083.

Table 3: Grand Isle County Labor Force Growth

Year	Labor Force	Change From Previous	% Change
1990	2,819	NA	NA
1999	3,506	687	24.4%
2009	4,257	751	21.4%
2019	3,995	-262	-6.2%
2024	4,083	88	2.2%
1990-2024	NA	1,264	44.8%

Franklin County

Grand Isle's eastern neighbor has experienced the third-fastest growth in labor force, expanding by 30.1% since 1990. The fastest period of growth in both numeric and percentage terms was 1990 to 1999 when the labor force increased by 2,939 or 14.0%. It grew by 11.3% (+2,697) in the next decade and peaked in 2012 at 27,962. The labor force declined by a small fraction (-0.7% or -186) during the 2009 – 2019 period. Since 2019, Franklin County has grown at the second-fastest rate in Vermont (+3.3%), reaching a labor force of 27,266 in 2024.

Table 4: Franklin County Labor Force Growth

Year	Labor Force	Change From Previous	% Change
1990	20,955	NA	NA
1999	23,894	2,939	14.0%
2009	26,591	2,697	11.3%
2019	26,405	-186	-0.7%
2024	27,266	861	3.3%
1990-2024	NA	6,311	30.1%

Chittenden County

The labor force of the state's most populous county increased by the largest numeric amount of any Vermont county between 1990 and 2024, responsible for almost half (45.3%) of statewide labor force growth. While the majority of that growth happened between 1990 and 1999 (+13,197 or +17.1%), Chittenden's growth pattern over the next two decades was opposite the state, declining slightly between 1999 and 2009 (-283 or -0.3%) before increasing by 8,458 (+9.4%) in the following decade.

Since 2019 it added another 1,399 people (+1.4%) to its labor force. Unlike most other Vermont counties, Chittenden's 2024 annual labor force average labor force was the highest figure it has ever recorded at 100,160.

Table 5: Chittenden County Labor Force Growth

Year	Labor Force	Change From Previous	% Change
1990	77,389	NA	NA
1999	90,586	13,197	17.1%
2009	90,303	-283	-0.3%
2019	98,761	8,458	9.4%
2024	100,160	1,399	1.4%
1990-2024	NA	22,771	29.4%

Addison County

Chittenden's southern neighbor had a 18,381 person labor force in 1990. It experienced a 19.1% (+3,506) growth between then and 2024. The plurality of the growth occurred between 1990 and 1999 when the labor force increased by 1,873 (+10.2%). It grew by a similar amount in the 2000s, adding 1,634 (+8.1%) and reaching its largest labor force on record in 2009 (21,888).

During the teens it gave up some of those gains, declining by 948 (-4.3%). Since that time, however, it has been the fastest-growing county in the state, increasing by 4.5% (+947). Combining these changes, the 2024 annual average labor force was one person smaller than its 2009 peak.

Table 6: Addison County Labor Force Growth

Year	Labor Force	Change From Previous	% Change
1990	18,381	NA	NA
1999	20,254	1,873	10.2%
2009	21,888	1,634	8.1%
2019	20,940	-948	-4.3%
2024	21,887	947	4.5%
1990-2024	NA	3,506	19.1%

Orleans County

The fastest-growing of the Northeast Kingdom counties, Orleans' labor force was 11,905 in 1990 and grew by 17.8% or 2,125 persons between then and 2024. Unlike many Vermont counties, Orleans' fastest growth was during the 2000s. During that decade it grew by 16.0% (+2,010), reaching its peak labor force of 14,566 in 2009.

It gave back about a quarter of those gains between then and 2019. In the past five years it has seen slow growth, increasing by 0.7% (+96). The 2024 annual average labor force in Orleans county was 14,030.

Table 7: Orleans County Labor Force Growth

Year	Labor Force	Change From Previous	% Change
1990	11,905	NA	NA
1999	12,556	651	5.5%
2009	14,566	2,010	16.0%
2019	13,934	-632	-4.3%
2024	14,030	96	0.7%
1990-2024	NA	2,125	17.8%

Orange County

Orange County's labor market is closely-integrated with its easterly neighbor, Grafton County, NH. Approximately 17% (1,700) of Orange's labor force is employed in Grafton County. Approximately 460 people make the opposite commute. Orange county grew by 12.5% (1,767) in the 1990s, a rate that slowed to 4.4% in the first decade of the 2000s. Its highest annual average labor force was 16,709 in 2010. Since that time it has declined by 279 (-1.7%).

Table 8: Orange County Labor Force Growth

Year	Labor Force	Change From Previous	% Change
1990	14,160	NA	NA
1999	15,927	1,767	12.5%
2009	16,621	694	4.4%
2019	16,191	-430	-2.6%
2024	16,470	239	1.4%
1990-2024	NA	2,310	16.3%

Caledonia County

The most populous county in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom, Caledonia County has experienced a 15.7% increase in the size of its labor force over the past 34 years. Similar to its northern neighbor, Orleans, Caledonia's fastest growth was between 1999 and 2009, during which it added 1,483 Vermonters to its labor force (+9.7%). Its labor force reached its highest level in 2006 at 16,786; tied with Rutland and Grand Isle Counties for the earliest peak. Since 2006 it has lost 249 persons, though it has grown at a rate of 2.9% since 2019.

Table 9: Caledonia County Labor Force Growth

Year	Labor Force	Change From Previous	% Change
1990	14,287	NA	NA
1999	15,277	990	6.9%
2009	16,760	1,483	9.7%
2019	16,074	-686	-4.1%
2024	16,537	463	2.9%
1990-2024	NA	2,250	15.7%

Windham County

Vermont's southeastern most county is one of only four Vermont counties that has seen a decline in labor force since 2019 (-1.1% or 273 people). After experiencing relatively steady growth in the two decades after 1990, its growth slowed and its labor force peaked at at 25,985 in 2016. This peak is the latest among Vermont counties with the exception of Chittenden. In 2024 the county's labor force was 24,654, 5.1% or 1,331 people below that peak.

Table 10: Windham County Labor Force Growth

Year	Labor Force	Change From Previous	% Change
1990	21,824	NA	NA
1999	23,697	1,873	8.6%
2009	25,238	1,541	6.5%
2019	24,927	-311	-1.2%
2024	24,654	-273	-1.1%
1990-2024	NA	2,830	13.0%

Washington County

Somewhat the exception, Washington's labor force growth was highest in the 2000s, growing 9.0% (+2,862) between 1999 and 2009 after growth of 7.3% (+2,176) in the decade prior. Washington County's labor force peaked at 35,080 in 2010. Over the next decade, it declined by 3.8% (-1,316). Since 2019, it has fallen by another 0.3% (-113). It is one of just four counties with a 2024 labor force smaller than 2019.

Table 11: Washington County Labor Force Growth

Year	Labor Force	Change From Previous	% Change
1990	29,765	NA	NA
1999	31,941	2,176	7.3%
2009	34,803	2,862	9.0%
2019	33,487	-1,316	-3.8%
2024	33,374	-113	-0.3%
1990-2024	NA	3,609	12.1%

Windsor County

Windsor County's 2024 labor force of 30,570 is 4.3% (+1,270 people) larger than it was in 1990. After near double-digit growth in the 1990s (+2,703 or 9.2%) the increase slowed to 4.0% (+1,275) in the 2000s. After peaking at 33,278 in 2009 the labor force declined by 9.0% (-3,006) in the 2009 – 2019 period, giving up more than it had gained in the 1990s. The decline has since turned positive with 1.0% growth between 2019 and 2024.

Table 12: Windsor County Labor Force Growth

Year	Labor Force	Change From Previous	% Change
1990	29,300	NA	NA
1999	32,003	2,703	9.2%
2009	33,278	1,275	4.0%
2019	30,272	-3,006	-9.0%
2024	30,570	298	1.0%
1990-2024	NA	1,270	4.3%

Essex County

The smallest labor force in the state, Essex County's labor force peaked at 3,314 in 2009 after a decade of 13.6% growth. That growth turned sharply negative in the decade that followed, a time during which the labor force gave up all of those gains and more, losing 512 persons (-15.4%). Essex County's 2024 labor force (2,870) is 74 persons or 2.6% larger than 1990.

Table 13: Essex County Labor Force Growth

Year	Labor Force	Change From Previous	% Change
1990	2,796	NA	NA
1999	2,916	120	4.3%
2009	3,314	398	13.6%
2019	2,802	-512	-15.4%
2024	2,870	68	2.4%
1990-2024	NA	74	2.6%

Bennington County

The labor force in Vermont's southwestern most county is 2.7% smaller (-507) today than it was in 1990. It experienced labor force growth in the 1990s and 2000s (+9.1% and plus 0.5% respectively), peaking at 20,597 in 2009 before a long and steady decline across the 2010s. By 2019 the labor force had declined by 1,867 people (-9.1%). The decline has not been arrested and the 2024 labor force was another 2.4% smaller (-453).

Table 14: Bennington County Labor Force Growth

Year	Labor Force	Change From Previous	% Change
1990	18,784	NA	NA
1999	20,499	1,715	9.1%
2009	20,597	98	0.5%
2019	18,730	-1,867	-9.1%
2024	18,277	-453	-2.4%
1990-2024	NA	-507	-2.7%

Rutland County

While Lamoille County experienced the fastest labor force growth between 1990 and 2024, Rutland County experienced the fastest decline. Over the 34-year period its labor force declined by 7.3% (-2,371). While the labor force grew by 11.0% (+3,528) in the first decade of the 2000s it declined in the decade before, falling by 1.8% at a time when the statewide labor force increased by 10.3%.

It also declined in the decade of the 2010s, falling by 4,336 or -12.2%. In the period since 2019 its labor force has lost another 965 people (-3.1%).

Table 15: Rutland County Labor Force Growth

Year	Labor Force	Change From Previous	% Change
1990	32,691	NA	NA
1999	32,093	-598	-1.8%
2009	35,621	3,528	11.0%
2019	31,285	-4,336	-12.2%
2024	30,320	-965	-3.1%
1990-2024	NA	-2,371	-7.3%

Over the past three decades, Vermont's labor force has undergone significant shifts, shaped in large part by demographic changes and broader national trends. While the statewide labor force has grown by 16.4% since 1990, this growth has been uneven across Vermont's 14 counties. Several counties—including Lamoille, Grand Isle, and Franklin—have experienced significant expansion. Others such as Rutland and Bennington have seen declines. The aging population has played a key role in labor force contraction, with the share of Vermonters over 65 years old increasing notably since 2009.