

2026 WAGE and WORKFORCE STUDY



The Kentucky Association of Manufacturers (KAM) is committed to advocating for and educating members of Kentucky's manufacturing community. The KAM Wage and Workforce Study, presented by the KY Community and Technical College System, gathers both starting and 5-year wages for production occupations. For 2026, we incorporated a battery of questions exploring the use of Artificial Intelligence in Manufacturing. The Wage and Workforce Study continues to function as a critical tool for insights, helping manufacturers navigate and shape their workforce strategies for the future.

Vacation and Sick Days

Seven out of ten participating companies allow employees to convert their unused vacation days, and 100% offer at least one week of vacation.

70% 
of employers offer two weeks of vacation within an employee's first year.

70%
of companies permit employees to convert unused vacation days.

 **48%**
Carry Over

 **44%**
Cash

43%
of companies grant paid sick days.

 **29%** grant 1 to 5 sick days.
11% grant 6 to 10 sick days.

Health Insurance

Nearly three of four companies experienced an increase in their health insurance premiums, and the majority of employees have a monthly premium of \$200 or less for individual coverage.

74% of companies had a percentage increase at their last anniversary date for health insurance. **56%** of companies' percentage increase was between 1-10%.



84% of employers provide health care plans that have a typical monthly premium of \$200 or less for individual coverage.

Attraction and Recruitment Practices

More than two-thirds of companies are actively using referrals from existing employees and online ads for open positions to find new employees for their facility.

 **92%** use referrals from existing employees.

 **71%** use online ads for open positions.

 **51%** use job fairs.

SPONSORS



PARTNERS



Fair Chance Employment

Four of five companies include criminal background checks, and most are willing to hire individuals who have previously been involved with the justice system, but with limitations.



81%

conduct criminal background checks. 80% will employ individuals who have previously been involved with the justice system, but with limitations.



89%

accept misdemeanor class B infractions. 91% accept misdemeanor class A infractions.

Artificial Intelligence Usage

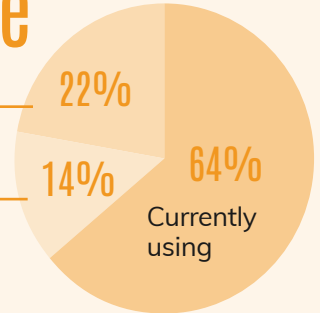
No plans to use

22%

Planning to use

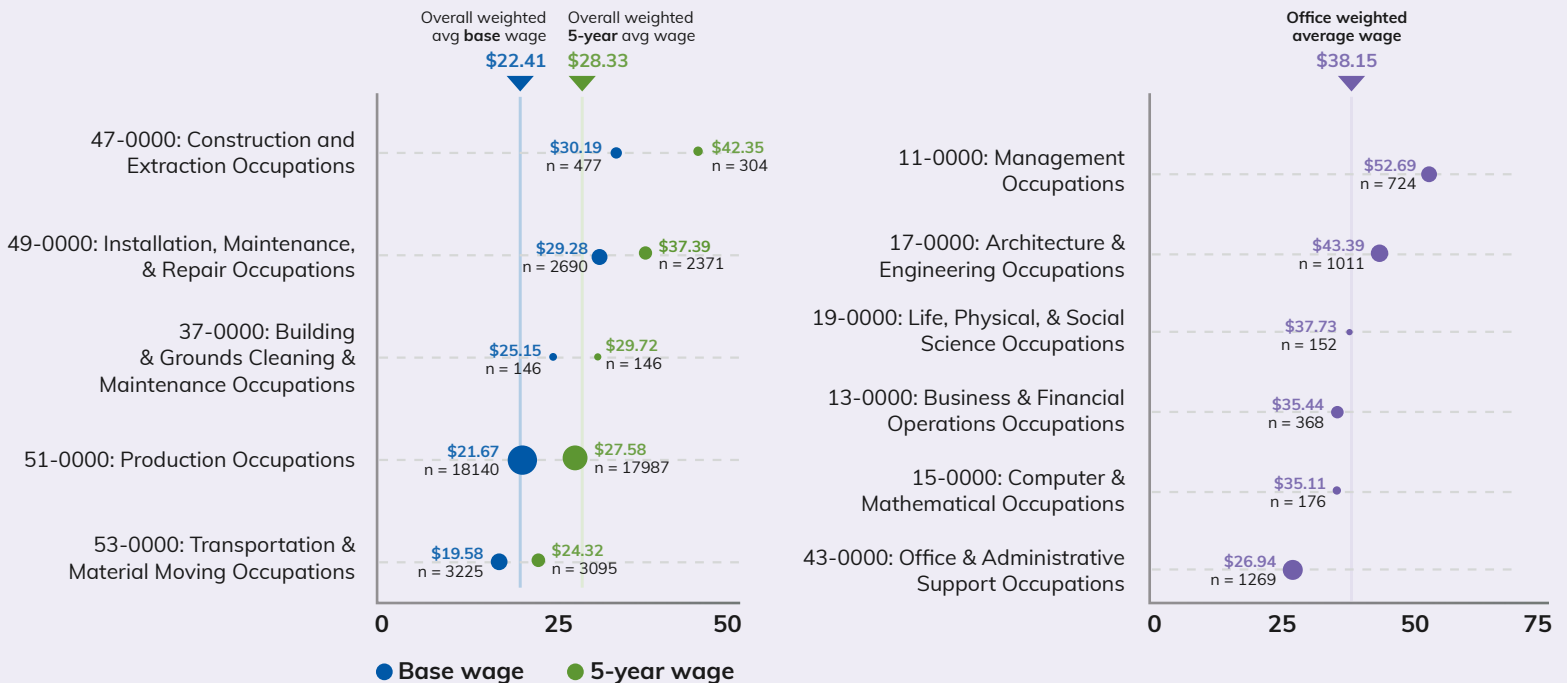
14%

64%
Currently using



Wages

For the 2026 Study, production wages were once again gathered at both the starting and 5-year periods.



Since 1911, the Kentucky Association of Manufacturers (KAM) has served as the leading advocate for the manufacturing industry in the Commonwealth. If you are a manufacturer or serve manufacturers, contact us today to learn more about the benefits of membership.

To purchase a full version of the 2026 Wage and Workforce Study, contact us or visit the website at www.kam.us.com

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METHODOLOGY

For the 2026 study, a working group composed of representatives from the Kentucky Association of Manufacturers, HR leaders at KAM member companies, and IQS Research reviewed the instrument for any possible changes or updates. The method used to collect production wages was retained from 2025, and a set of AI questions was added. For 2026, the questions were otherwise unchanged.

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