

Log Truck Driver Compensation Lags That of General Freight Drivers Over the Last Decade

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TECHNICAL RELEASE • April 2023

23 -R- 02

INTRODUCTION

Logging businesses compete with other logging businesses for truck drivers, as well as businesses in other industries. Log truck driver compensation must be competitive with other industries for logging businesses to attract and retain safe and productive drivers. We examined the most recent Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) data published by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) to evaluate the competitiveness of wages for log truck drivers. Data on general freight truck drivers served as the basis for comparison as it represents the entire trucking industry and sufficient data was available for the entire period from 2012 to 2021. Due to the regional constraints of the logging industry compared to general freight trucking, as well as data availability, we only included data from the top timber producing states in four regions of the United States. For each of these states we examined the available BLS data of the average hourly wage of truck drivers in both trucking sectors for the 10-yr period.

- South: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia
- Northeast: Maine, New Hampshire, New York, Vermont
- Lake States: Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin
- West: California, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington

RESULTS

From 2012-2021, the hourly wages for both log truck and general freight drivers steadily increased as adjustments were made for inflation and workforce competition (Fig. 1). However, differences between regions and sectors are evident. On average, general freight truck drivers were paid more than log truck drivers in all regions during 9 of the 10 years. Among log truck drivers, those in the US West consistently received higher wages than in any other region. Wages for log truck drivers in the West were similar to general freight drivers until 2019, when their average wage exceeded general freight drivers in the last three years of the study.

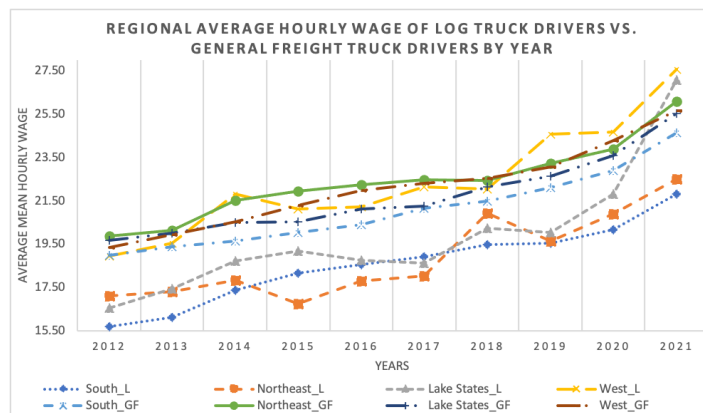


Figure 1: Comparison of regional hourly wages between log truck drivers (L) and general freight truck drivers (GF) from 2012-2021.

From 2012-2021 log truck drivers received average hourly wages of \$18.79, \$19.33, \$20.76, and \$22.43 per hour in the South, Northeast, Lake States, and West, respectively (Table 1). In contrast, general freight truck drivers averaged more than \$21 per hour in every region. However, log truck drivers experienced a greater average annual increase in hourly wages compared to their general freight counterparts across all regions. This trend shows that progress is being made in closing the pay gap between log truck drivers and those in competing industries.

Regional Average Hourly Wage of Log Truck Drivers and General Freight Truck Drivers by Year (\$)							
		2012	2015	2018	2021	Average	Average Annual Increase
Log Truck Drivers	South	15.71	18.16	19.48	21.82	18.79	3.72%
	Northeast	17.11	16.74	20.93	22.52	19.33	3.10%
	Lake States	16.56	19.17	20.22	27.07	20.76	5.61%
	West	18.95	21.14	22.05	27.56	22.43	4.25%
General Freight Truck Drivers	South	18.98	20.04	21.49	24.66	21.29	2.95%
	Northeast	19.86	21.96	22.46	26.10	22.59	3.08%
	Lake States	19.68	20.53	22.14	25.54	21.97	2.94%
	West	19.34	21.30	22.53	25.65	22.21	3.19%

Table 1: Regional average hourly wage of log truck drivers and general freight truck drivers from 2012-2021.

Log truck drivers in the South were among the lowest paid drivers of any region or sector during the period (Table 1). Statewide surveys of logging business owners (e.g., FRA Tech Release 18-R-12) report difficulties recruiting qualified truck drivers and compensation could be one of the reasons for these challenges. According to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, the cost of living in the US South is generally lower than in the US Northeast and West, and so this may justify lower wages than in those regions. However, within the region, log truck drivers were paid an average of 12% less than drivers in other sectors, making it difficult to compete. While the South's top three timber producing states (i.e., GA, AL, NC) experienced log truck driver wage increases throughout the period, their pay was often lower than for log truck drivers within the southern region, log truck drivers in other regions, and lower than for drivers in other industries (Fig 2, Table 1). For most years, only one of the top three southern timber-producing states paid drivers above the southern regional average hourly wage, such as in 2015, in which Georgia paid \$18.28 per hour compared to the southern region average of \$18.16 for log truck drivers. Of these three states, Georgia and Alabama have similar wage rates, although Georgia paid their drivers slightly more throughout the period. North Carolina consistently paid their drivers less than Georgia and Alabama in every year except in 2015.

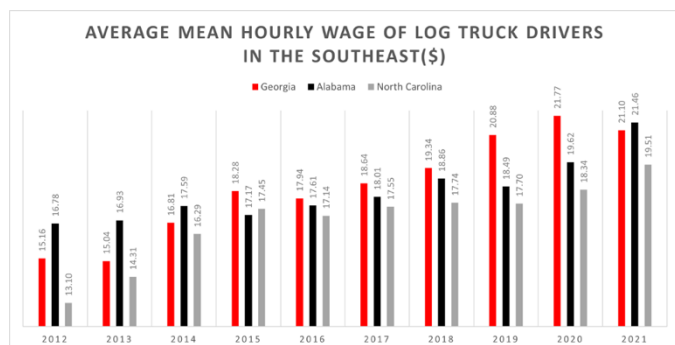


Figure 2: Log truck driver hourly wage trends for the South's top three timber producers from 2012-2021.

CONCLUSION

Wage data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics clearly document the wage gap between log truck drivers and general freight drivers over the last decade. We recognize that BLS data may not be as representative for log truck drivers due to the smaller sample size and diversity of logging business types; nonetheless, there have been improvements in some regions to reach equilibrium with the trucking industry as a whole. The data indicates that the southern U.S. continues to pay its log truck drivers less than log truck drivers in other regions and less than competing industries in the South and in other regions. Furthermore, the southern region's top three timber producing states pay their truck drivers less than the already low regional average. While log truck driver wages have increased more rapidly than general freight driver wages, more increases are necessary to close the gap and enhance competitiveness and attractiveness of the forest industry to potential drivers. The industry must focus on providing a competitive compensation package including wages, benefits, and quality of life to attract safe and reliable truck drivers. Given the challenges associated with trucking capacity and safety, the forest industry must continue to enhance its competitiveness and professionalism.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was jointly funded by the Harley Langdale Jr. Center for Forest Business at the University of Georgia and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service.

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