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Southern Agricultural Economics Association

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H-2A Trends in the Delta States Region from FY2008 to FY2021

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Introduction

- The Delta states are large agricultural producers in the Southern U.S. with a large value of agricultural exports
 - Arkansas ranks 17th
 - Louisiana 29th, and
 - Mississippi 24th
- The H-2A program is picking up momentum in the Delta states, providing labor for various agricultural jobs where resident workers are not available.
- The H-2A program requires that workers must be paid at least the Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR) for their area and be provided housing and meal accommodations.
- Challenges arise as agricultural operators need to balance labor demand and labor costs.

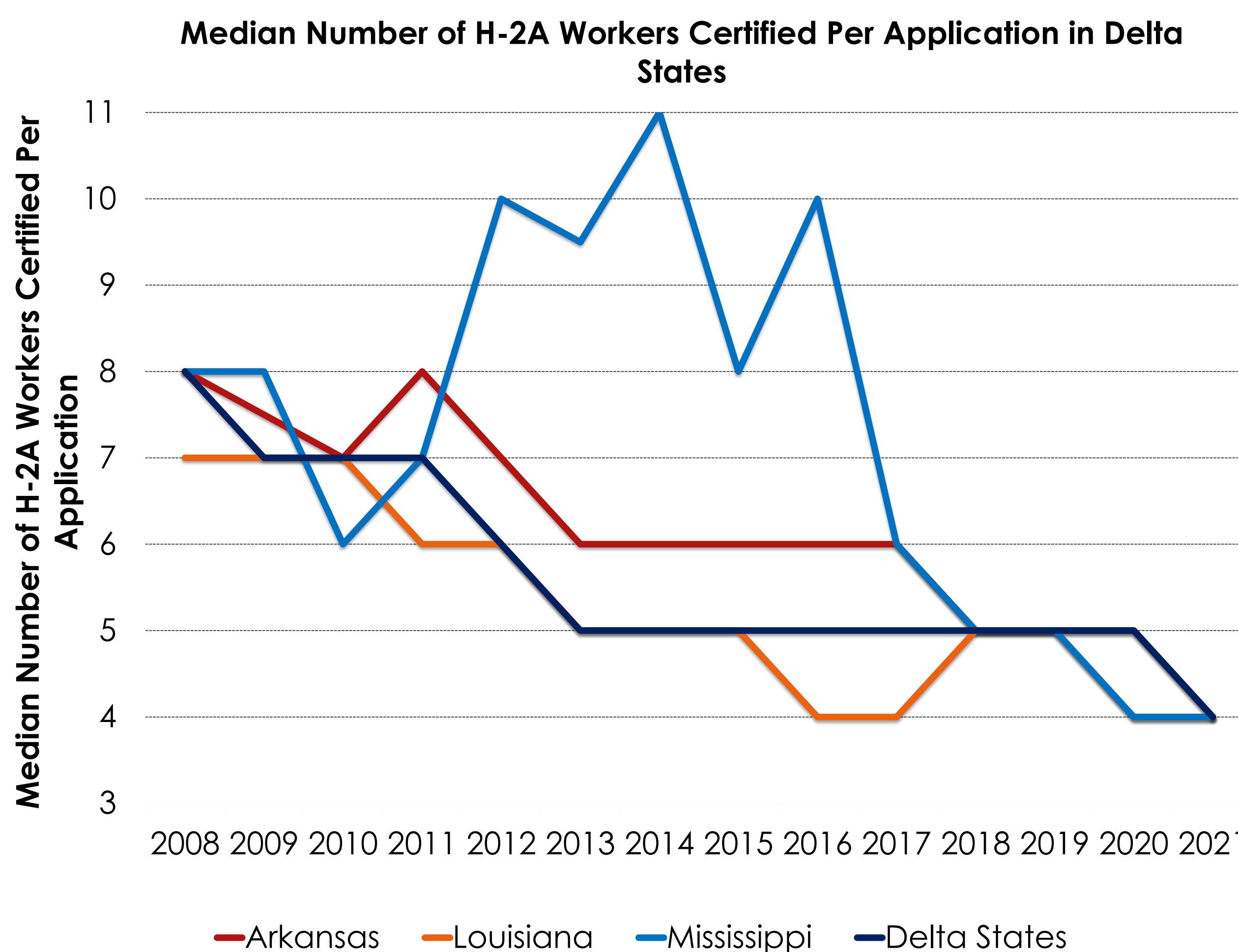
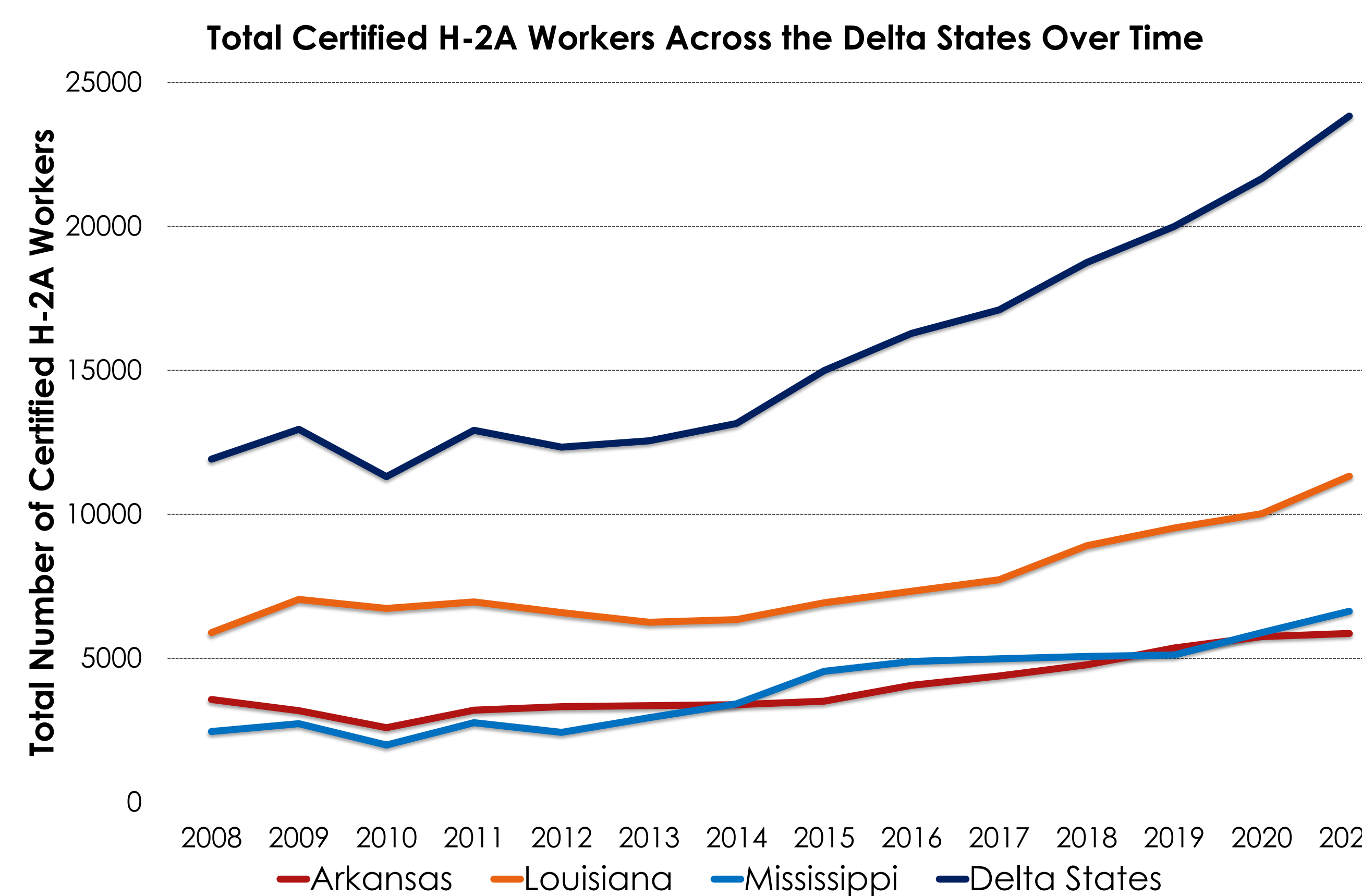
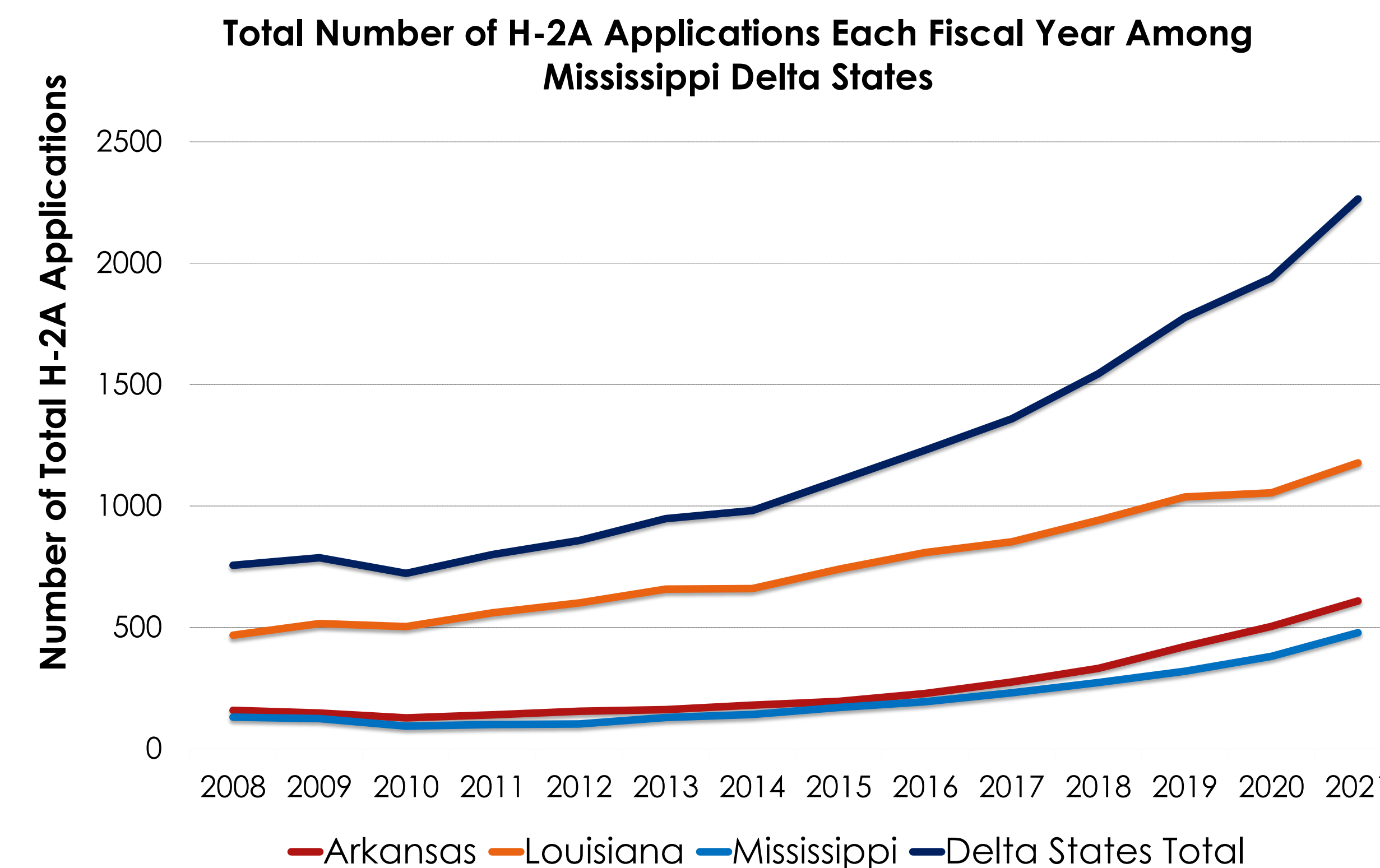
Objectives

- Examine the use of the H-2A program in the Delta States region
- Document trends and patterns in the H-2A Program
- Identify potential policy implications

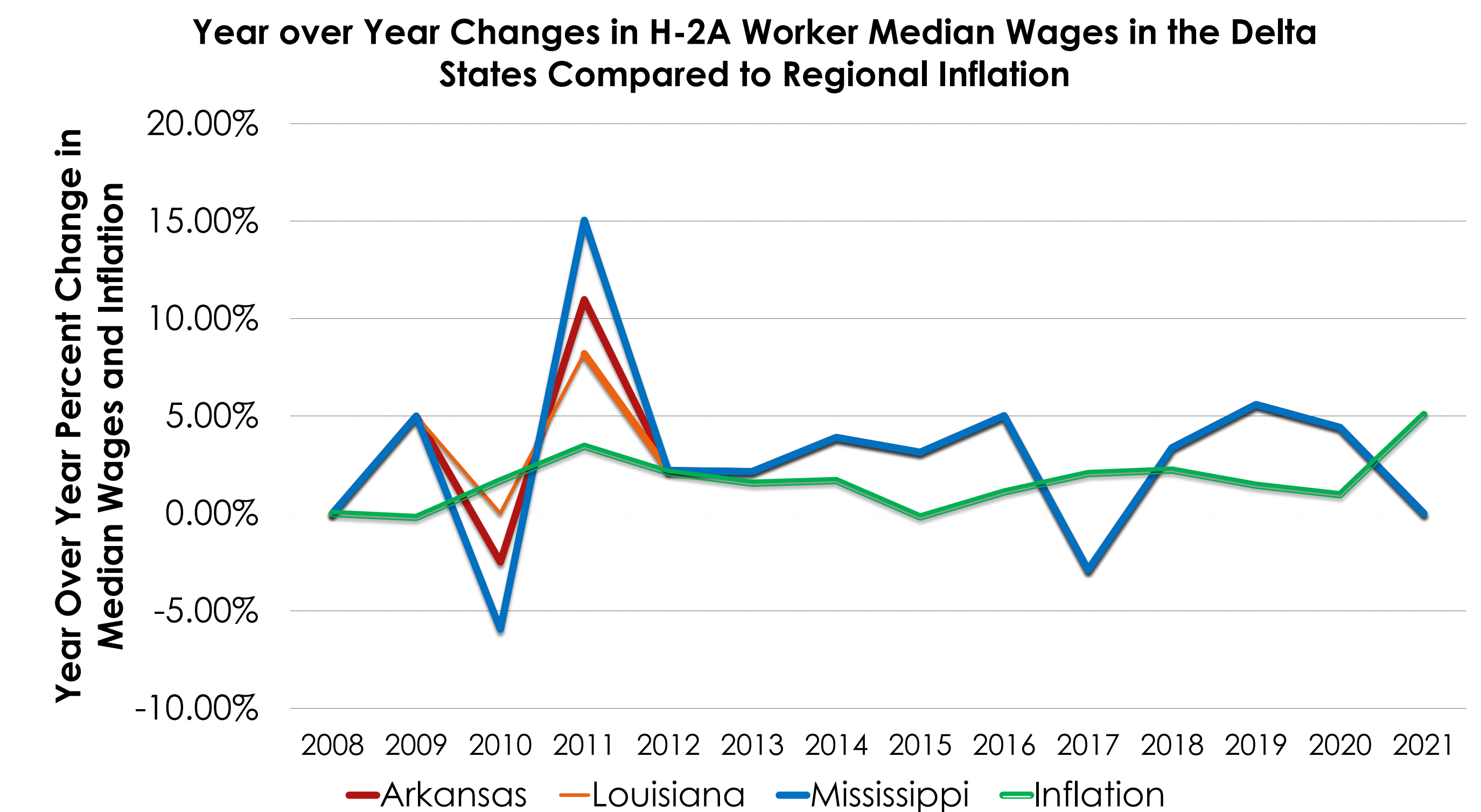
Data Analysis

- Data on H-2A applications was collected from the U.S. Department of Labor USCIS.
- The data was analyzed using R, grouping the files into three distinct groups based on the data that was collected during the specific time-period to ensure consistent data-importation: from 2008-2014, 2015-2019, and 2020-2021.
- Applications were analyzed by state and year, and then grouped together to calculate statistics for the whole Delta States region.
- Inflation data was collected from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and is the average CPI for the year given of the inflation within the Southern region of the United States.

Trends in Program Use



Wages



- Median wages among ag-workers in the Delta states have slowly, but consistently increased from FY2008 to FY2021, from about \$8 per hour to slightly under \$12 an hour.
- Median and AEWR have considerably been higher than state and federal minimum wages, which has been \$7.25 per hour since 2009.
- Inflation in the Southern U.S. has increased at a rate less than the increase of median wages every year except three: 2010, 2017, and 2021.

Observations & Policy Implications

- More agricultural operations in the Delta States are becoming reliant on H-2A workers as the pool of labor from resident workers has decreased.
- Delta State agricultural operations are likely facing higher costs for hiring workers, lowering the median number of workers hired per application.
 - Wages have faced occasional stagnation (2021) and decline (2010, 2017)
 - inflation has continuously risen, besides minute declines in 2009 and 2015.
- The number of H-2A laborers during the COVID-19 pandemic increased despite restrictions on immigration and temporary visas
- Wages during the pandemic remained stagnant, indicating a larger need for agricultural workers.