



# TARGET INDUSTRY & SMART GROWTH ANALYSIS

OCTOBER 2025



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# INTRODUCTION: SETTING THE STAGE FOR INDUSTRY FOCUS.

This Target Industry Analysis is intended to provide the City of Eustis with a focused, data-informed perspective on industries that align its assets, constraints, and long-term goals. The purpose of this work is to help guide future economic development efforts by identifying sectors that can support job creation, tax base growth, and community vitality.

Importantly, this effort reflects a proactive step by the city. Rather than continuing with business as usual or relying on outdated assumptions, Eustis is choosing to take a thoughtful and deliberate approach to shaping its economic future. This analysis is part of a broader commitment to understanding what is possible and what must be addressed to move forward with confidence.

While the intent is to highlight opportunity, it is equally important to understand the broader context in which these opportunities exist. This is not a strategic plan. It does not offer solutions or prescribe specific actions. Instead, it presents the foundational conditions that will influence the success of any industry attraction effort. Eustis has several strengths to build on, including a strong sense of place, access to natural resources, and proximity to a growing regional economy. These assets provide a platform for growth, but there are also structural and political realities that must be acknowledged and addressed.

## Key Considerations for Industry Attraction

- **Infrastructure Capacity:** Eustis has some utility infrastructure in place, but power availability remains a concern, particularly for energy-intensive industries such as data centers. Water resources exist, though they are carefully managed, and wastewater capacity may need to be expanded to support certain types of industrial activity.
- **Land Use and Development Pressure:** Much of the land that could support new development is located in areas where agricultural preservation is a priority. The community's rural identity and the influence of the agricultural sector create resistance to large-scale industrial uses, especially those that could disrupt existing land use patterns.
- **Workforce and Industry Fit:** The local workforce is well-positioned to support light manufacturing, logistics, and skilled trades. However, many of the industries that align with this labor pool also face land use or infrastructure constraints, which limits the range of feasible options.
- **Community Vision and Market Alignment:** There is strong interest in attracting high-tech and innovation-driven industries. While these aspirations are commendable, they may not align with current infrastructure or workforce realities. Achieving this vision will require long-term investment and a clear understanding of what is realistically attainable in the near term.
- **Coordination and Strategic Focus:** Eustis is actively pursuing a range of efforts to support growth and improve quality of life. These initiatives reflect a strong commitment to progress. However, without a shared framework to connect them, there is a risk that resources may not be fully aligned or opportunities may be missed. A more coordinated approach would help ensure that all efforts are moving in the same direction and reinforcing the City's long-term goals.

These considerations are not barriers to progress. They are important guideposts that can help the city make informed decisions and avoid missteps. By acknowledging these realities early, Eustis can better position itself to pursue industries that are both desirable and achievable. The following sections outline industry opportunities that reflect this balance, grounded in current conditions but with an eye toward future potential.

# IMPRESSION

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

Communities experience difficulties seeing their surroundings as clients, guests, prospective industries and newcomers to the area see them. The information below outlines impressions as perceived by a site selector. Note that these impressions from visiting a community are often the second impression, the first impression a site selector sees is a community's online data.



### 01 COMMUNITY IDENTITY & ASPIRATIONS

- There is pride in local heritage and interest in reviving arts, culture and beautification.
- Stakeholders want to differentiate Eustis from neighboring cities like Mount Dora and Clermont.
- Eustis is widely seen as a “diamond in the rough” with untapped potential.
- There is a desire to cultivate a boutique, artsy, Winter Garden/Winter Park-style vibe; not replicate Orlando.

### 02 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OUTLOOK

- Stakeholders are optimistic about the business incubator's potential to catalyze innovation.
- Strong interest in clean, tech-forward industries such as aerospace, AgTech, digital marketing and creative design.
- HUBZone and Opportunity Zone designations are viewed as strategic assets for attracting investment.
- Downtown is envisioned as a future hub for retail, hospitality and entertainment.

### 03 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & WORKFORCE

- Stakeholders are passionate about providing opportunity that retains the city's youth.
- There is a desire to create generational wealth throughout the city, while being cognizant of underserved areas.
- Lake Tech and Lake Sumter College are seen as valuable partners for workforce development.
- There are concerns about underperforming schools, lack of youth programming and limited job opportunities in East Eustis.



## STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK.

### YOU SPOKE, WE LISTENED

VisionFirst held in-person interviews with numerous stakeholders, including elected officials, existing business leaders, board members, city leadership, young professionals, and regional partners to gain a better understanding of current operations, programs, products and services related to economic development efforts in Eustis, FL.



Every stakeholder meeting produced productive dialogue about the city's future, identifying both critical issues and attainable opportunities. The group interviews sought to gather candid observations, feedback and ideas from the community to help direct focus and prioritize our analysis.

During the conversations, VisionFirst sought answers to questions centered on such topics as:

- What is the definition of economic development for Eustis?
- What are the barriers to success?
- Who are the partners for the city's economic development efforts?
- What does success look like for Eustis and economic development over the next three to five years?
- What industries are desired or not desired by Eustis?
- How will the organization measure success?

Through synthesis, VisionFirst identified the strongest themes, insights and supporting details.

Key findings from the meetings are presented in aggregate on the following pages and have been grouped by the main themes that resulted from the stakeholder conversations. Although the meetings focused on the City of Eustis and its role in leading local economic development, the discussion also covered the needs in the broader community.

***The comments listed on the following page are a sampling of the meeting outcomes from local leaders and do not reflect VisionFirst's opinion.***

## **Industry Targets & Growth**

- Strong interest in clean, tech-forward industries such as aerospace, AgTech, digital marketing and creative design.
- Stakeholders are optimistic about the business incubator’s potential to catalyze innovation.
- HUBZone and Opportunity Zone designations are viewed as strategic assets for attracting investment.
- Downtown is envisioned as a future hub for retail, hospitality and entertainment.

## **Education and Workforce Development**

- Workforce gaps persist, especially in East Eustis, where youth are disconnected from job opportunities.
- Local schools face performance and staffing challenges, despite strong county-wide ratings.
- Stakeholders support supplemental education programs, STEAM initiatives, and career pathways tied to local industries.
- Lake Tech and Lake Sumter College are highly engaged and seen as critical partners for customized training and internships.

## **Community Development and Infrastructure**

- City-owned land (e.g. 44B, 70-acre site) presents development opportunities, but lack of zoning and annexation strategy hinders progress.
- Traffic congestion, consumptive use permits (CUP) limitations, and lack of affordable housing are recurring concerns.
- Infill development is possible but complicated by jurisdictional boundaries and unclear land control.
- Beautification efforts and cultural programming (e.g., Eustis in Bloom) reflect a desire for placemaking and civic pride.

## **Governance and Engagement**

- The strategic planning process has stalled, and the City Commission is seen as reactive and inconsistent.
- Public engagement is low, especially among younger residents and underserved communities.
- Stakeholders want visionary leadership, stronger intergovernmental coordination, and more transparent decision-making.
- City staff are praised for doing “the most with the least,” but internal processes are perceived as slow and siloed.

## UNDERSTANDING THE COMPETITIVE LANDSCAPE.

The race for jobs and capital investment is exactly that — **a competition**. Every day, communities compete to attract new businesses, support the expansion of existing ones and influence where private capital is invested.

To assess Eustis' position in this landscape, a comprehensive competitive data analysis was conducted. This analysis synthesizes key data points, including demographics, economic trends and performance rankings that impact the region.

The evaluation compared data from multiple geographic perspectives:

- Eustis, FL (City)
- 45-Minute Drive Time (from city center)
- Lake County, FL
- Florida (State)
- USA (Nation)

This data was benchmarked against state and national figures across various categories such as:

- Labor force and educational attainment
- Industry size and growth trends
- Occupational patterns and laborshed dynamics
- Location quotients
- Social service metrics

The research included over 25 metrics, strategically grouped into key categories to provide a comprehensive view of Eustis' competitive advantages and opportunities for growth. On the following pages is a snapshot of Figure 1 data.





## DATA-AT-A-GLANCE.



The data-driven, decision-making approach can often be the first step in how site selectors and business decision makers evaluate a potential location after understanding the needs assessment of the client.

Potential economic development projects often begin with the consideration of states and defined geographic regions (i.e., metros, electric utility service territories). Rarely does a prospect, company or site selector have a specific community in mind. However, communities can increase their visibility through increased internal and external messaging, while also having a strong online presence. Good data and statistical information help site selectors and corporate decision makers conduct a cost-benefit analysis and gives them an idea of the project's likelihood for success in the region.

Because site selectors and location advisors often review high-level data prior to a visit, it is vital for Eustis to understand and analyze data from an online data viewpoint to:

- Highlight favorable data in the region that indicates a bottom-line advantage to a company.
- Recognize less favorable data that could cause a potential threat to a company, while explaining how the community and region are addressing issues.
- Recognize flawed data and provide alternative yet reliable aggregated data.

# Economic Overview

FIGURE 1: ECONOMIC OVERVIEW COMPARISON

To help interpret the data more easily, we've applied a simple color-coding system in the figure below. **Green highlights indicate positive or strong data points**—areas where performance or conditions are favorable. **Yellow is used for neutral or moderate values** that may warrant monitoring but are not immediately concerning. **Red flags potential risks, challenges, or underperforming indicators** that may need further attention. This visual layer is designed to complement the narrative by drawing attention to key insights and helping users quickly identify strengths, watch areas, and possible concerns.

		Eustis, FL (City)	45-Minute Drive Time (Zip Codes)	Lake County, FL	Florida	USA
Current Population (ACS)		23,567	2,245,091	398,696	21,928,881	332,387,540
2020 Population (ACS)		21,010	-	356,115	21,216,924	326,569,308
2015 Population (ACS)		19,198	-	310,561	19,645,772	316,515,021
Annual Population Growth (2022 – 2023)		2.02%	1.65%	3.07%	1.36%	0.39%
People per Square Mile (ppsm)		-	-	446.1	421.4	94.8
Median Age		43.7	42.0	46.7	42.6	38.7
Civilian Population – age 16 years and over	Current Labor Force Size	11,725	1,111,662	178,746	10,725,531	168,567,852
	Labor Force Participate Rate	59.8%	60.4%	53.9%	59.4%	63.3%
	2020 Labor Force Size	10,488	-	158,035	10,240,825	164,759,496
	2020 Labor Participation Rate	61.4%	-	53.5%	58.8%	63.2%
Civilian Population - age 25-54	Current Prime-Age Labor Force Participation Rate	83.6%	83.3%	81.6%	82.5%	83.0%
	2020 Prime-Age Labor Force Participation Rate	86.6%	-	80.4%	81.5%	82.4%
Veterans (Age 18-64)		942	63,382	13,052	640,175	8,410,268
Veterans Labor Force Participation Rate		57.9%	75.1%	69.5%	74.4%	77.0%
Mean Commute Time (Min.)		26.8	28.5	29.9	28.0	26.6
Educational Attainment (H.S. Diploma or Higher)		87.8%	91.3%	90.9%	90.3%	90.0%
Educational Attainment (Assoc Degree or Higher)		32.8%	46.8%	39.1%	45.0%	45.8%
No High School Diploma		12.2%	8.7%	9.1%	9.7%	10.0%
High School Graduate		35.9%	25.8%	30.6%	26.7%	25.0%
Some College, No Degree		19.1%	18.8%	21.2%	18.6%	19.3%
Associate degree		12.0%	12.1%	12.8%	11.0%	9.2%

	Eustis, FL (City)	45-Minute Drive Time (Zip Codes)	Lake County, FL	Florida	USA
Bachelor's Degree	14.0%	23.1%	18.1%	22.0%	22.8%
Postgraduate Degree	6.9%	11.6%	8.2%	12.0%	13.8%
Total Housing Units	10,735	967,048	182,666	10,082,356	142,332,876
Median House Value (owner-occupied)	\$245,400	\$331,861	\$287,900	\$325,000	\$303,400
2020 Total Housing Units	9,231	-	160,237	9,562,324	138,432,751
Annual Average Wage	\$52,270	\$63,929	\$52,214	\$67,809	\$74,181
Cost of Living Index	92.4	95.6	92.4	103.3	100.0
Poverty Level (of all people)	12.9%	11.3%	9.5%	12.6%	12.4%
Households Receiving Food Stamps/SNAP	12.8%	11.8%	9.9%	12.6%	11.8%
Disconnected Youth	10.7%	2.5%	4.1%	2.5%	2.4%
Children in Single Family Homes (% of all children)	33.6%	35.5%	33.4%	38.0%	34.0%
Union Membership (Private)	2.9%	3.0%	3.1%	2.5%	5.9%
Union Membership (Mfg)	2.9%	3.0%	2.8%	3.0%	7.6%

## WHAT THE DATA TELLS US.

### Demographics

- **Population Growth:** The City of Eustis has experienced robust population growth, adding over 4,000 new residents since 2015, a 22.8% increase. With an annual growth rate of 2.02%, Eustis is expanding faster than the surrounding 45-minute drive time area (1.65%), the state of Florida (1.36%), and the national average (0.39%). **This upward trend highlights Eustis as a dynamic and growing community.** Notably, Lake County leads the region with an annual growth rate of 3.07%, reinforcing the area's overall vitality and appeal. This population growth enhances economic development by expanding the labor force, increasing consumer demand, and boosting the city's market competitiveness.
- **Median Age:** Eustis has a median age of 43.7, slightly older than the surrounding 45-minute drive time area (42.0), the state of Florida (42.6), and significantly older than the national median (38.7). Lake County has the highest median age in the region at 46.7. This demographic trend suggests a mix of retirees and seasoned working-age residents, which can bring stability and experience to the workforce. However, it also raises concerns about long-term workforce sustainability and the availability of younger talent to fill future labor needs. **As the population continues to age, strategic efforts to attract and retain younger residents and workers will be critical to maintaining a vibrant labor pool and supporting ongoing economic growth.**

- **Population Density:** While specific density data for Eustis isn't provided, Lake County's 446.1 people per square mile is higher than both the state (421.4) and national (94.8) averages, suggesting a relatively concentrated population that can support workforce accessibility and infrastructure efficiency.

## Labor Force

- **Labor Force Participation Rate:** Eustis has a labor force participation rate of 59.8%, which is slightly below the national average of 63.3%. It is consistent with Florida at 59.4% and Lake County at 60.4%. This marks a small decline from 61.4% in 2020, suggesting a gradual decrease in overall workforce engagement.
- **Prime Age Labor Force Participation Rate:** The prime age labor force participation rate, which includes individuals between the ages of 25 and 54, remains strong at 83.6% for the city. This is higher than Florida at 82.5%, the 45-minute drive time at 83.3%, and Lake County at 81.6% and is consistent with the national average of 83.0%. **Still, it has decreased from 86.6% in 2020.** These shifts point to a need for continued focus on workforce development and talent retention. Supporting working-age residents and attracting younger workers will be important to maintaining a stable and competitive labor pool in the years ahead.
- **Veterans:** Eustis is home to 942 veterans between the ages of 18 and 64. Their labor force participation rate is 57.9%, which is significantly lower than the national rate of 77.0% and the Florida rate of 74.4%. **This may point to opportunities for veteran-focused workforce development and support services, especially given that the rate has declined from 61.9% in 2020.** In comparison, the 45-minute drive-time region has a veteran participation rate of 75.1%, which has increased slightly from 74.8% in 2021, the most recent historical data available.
- **Commute Time:** The average commute time in Eustis is 26.8 minutes, slightly below the state (28.0) and national (26.6) averages, suggesting reasonable access to employment centers and a manageable transportation burden for workers.

## Educational Attainment

- **High School Attainment or Higher:** 87.8% of Eustis residents have at least a high school diploma, slightly below Lake County (90.9%) and the state (90.3%), but close to the national average (90.0%).
- **Associate Degree or Higher:** Eustis lags behind with 32.8% of residents holding an associate degree or higher, compared to the 45-minute drive time region (46.8%), Florida (45.0%), and the U.S. (45.8%). This presents an opportunity to expand access to postsecondary education and workforce training.
- **Bachelor's and Postgraduate Degrees:** In Eustis, 14.0% of residents hold a bachelor's degree and 6.9% have earned a postgraduate degree. Both figures fall below the national averages of 22.8% and 13.8%, which may indicate a gap in higher-skilled labor. **When looking at the broader 45-minute drive time region, educational attainment improves significantly, with 23.1% of residents holding a bachelor's degree and 11.6% having a postgraduate degree.** This suggests that while Eustis may face challenges in attracting or retaining highly educated workers, the surrounding area offers a stronger pool of talent.

## Social Indicators

- **Housing Value:** The median home value in Eustis is \$245,400, significantly lower than the greater 45-minute drive time region (\$331,861), Lake County (\$287,900), Florida (\$325,000), and the national average (\$303,400). This affordability may attract new residents but could also reflect limited investment or slower housing market growth.
- **Poverty Rate:** Eustis's poverty rate of 12.9% is significantly higher than Lake County (9.5%) but in line with the national average (12.4%) and with Florida (12.6%), suggesting moderate economic challenges. **However, the city has made great strides, with the rate falling from 16.0% in 2020, reflecting positive momentum in local economic conditions and community support systems.**
- **SNAP:** In Eustis, 12.8% of households receive SNAP benefits. This is higher than Lake County at 9.9% and slightly above the state average of 12.6% and the national average of 11.8%. These figures point to a continued need for economic support services in the community. The elevated rate of participation may reflect underlying challenges related to income, employment, and access to opportunity. Strengthening local assistance programs, expanding outreach, and connecting residents to workforce development and financial stability resources will be important to help reduce reliance on public assistance and improve overall economic well-being.
- **Disconnected Youth:** Eustis has a high rate of disconnected youth at 10.7%, which is more than double the rate in Lake County at 4.1%. The rate is even lower when looking at the broader 45-minute drive time area and the state, both at 2.5%, and the national rate of 2.4%. **Unlike the poverty rate, which has improved over time, the rate of disconnected youth in Eustis has increased from 6.7% in 2020 to 10.7% today.** This upward trend is a serious concern. Disconnected youth are not in school and not working, which directly affects long-term workforce readiness, economic mobility, and community stability. Focused efforts will be needed to re-engage these young people and strengthen the future labor pipeline.
- **Single Parent Homes:** In Eustis, 33.6% of children live in single-parent households. This is in line with Lake County at 33.4% and the national average of 34.0%. **Encouragingly, this marks a significant improvement from 2022, when the rate was 44.8%.** Even with this progress, single-parent families often face added financial pressures, limited access to childcare, and fewer opportunities to work full-time. These challenges can affect participation in the workforce and overall economic mobility. Continued support through community programs and workforce initiatives will be important to help these families thrive and contribute fully to the local economy.

## Union Membership

- **Union Rates:** In Eustis, union membership is relatively low in both the private sector and manufacturing. About 2.9% of private sector workers are union members, which is well below the national average of 5.9% and closely aligned with Lake County and Florida. The same rate applies to manufacturing jobs in the city, which is also significantly lower than the national average of 7.6%. **These lower unionization rates suggest a more flexible labor environment, which may appeal to employers looking for fewer labor constraints and more control over workforce operations.**

Eustis shares many characteristics with Lake County and the state of Florida, but the data also highlights some important differences. Lower levels of educational attainment, a rising number of disconnected youth, and lower veteran labor force participation points to areas where focused investment could make a meaningful impact. **At the same time, Eustis shows clear strengths that can be used to support business recruitment and economic development messaging.**

### **Steady Population Growth**

- Eustis has grown by more than 22% since 2015, with an annual growth rate of just over 2%. That pace is faster than Lake County, the state, and the nation. This kind of growth is a strong signal that the community is attracting new residents and building momentum. A growing population means more workers, more customers, and a stronger foundation for long-term economic success.

### **Affordable Housing & Cost of Living**

- The median home value in Eustis is around \$245,400, which is significantly lower than the county, state, and national averages. This affordability can be a major advantage for families and workers looking to relocate, and for employers who want to attract talent without the high cost of living found in other parts of the state.

### **Strong Core Workforce**

- The prime working-age population in Eustis is highly engaged, with a participation rate of 83.6%. That is slightly above the state and national averages and shows that the city has a dependable labor pool at the heart of its workforce.

### **Flexible Labor Conditions**

- Union membership in Eustis is low in both the private sector and manufacturing, with rates at 2.9%. These are well below national averages and in line with local and state trends. This suggests a labor environment that offers flexibility for employers and may be appealing to companies looking for fewer labor constraints.

These strengths, combined with intentional efforts to improve educational attainment, re-engage disconnected youth, and support underutilized segments of the workforce, can position Eustis as a competitive and opportunity-rich community. With a growing population, affordable living, and a reliable core workforce, the city is well positioned to attract new investment and support the expansion of existing businesses.

# Eustis, FL Industry & Occupation Snapshot.

## INDUSTRY SNAPSHOT

The top five industry sectors account for **66.9%** of total employment Eustis. Notably, two of these sectors - **Healthcare and Social Assistance (\$58,322)**, and **Construction (\$69,354)** have annual wages that exceed the city average of **\$52,270**.

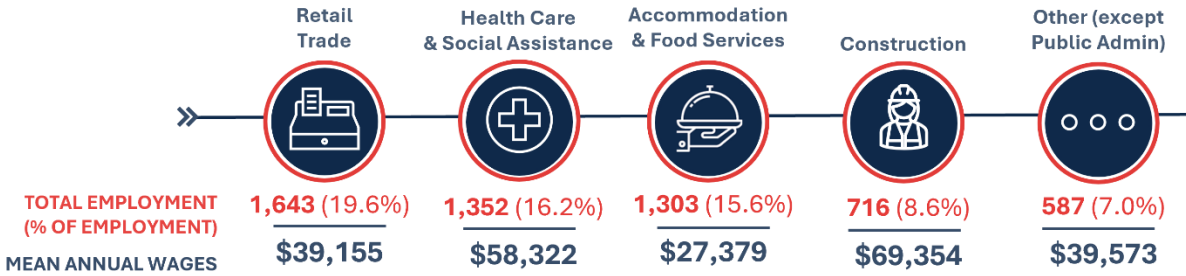


FIGURE 2: INDUSTRY SNAPSHOT (2025Q1)<sup>1</sup>

CHART READS » PERCENT OF EMPLOYMENT IN THE AREA SPECIFIED – TOTAL EMPLOYMENT IN SECTOR | AVERAGE ANNUAL WAGE | 5-YEAR HISTORIC CHANGE | 5-YEAR PROJECTED FORECAST.

NAICS	Eustis, Florida	Total Sector Employment	Average Annual Wages	5-Year HISTORIC	5-Year FORECAST
44	Retail Trade	1,643	\$39,155	2.9%	1.6%
62	Health Care and Social Assistance	1,352	\$58,322	-1.3%	2.4%
72	Accommodation and Food Services	1,303	\$27,379	1.9%	2.2%
23	Construction	716	\$69,354	5.6%	2.2%
81	Other Services (except Public Administration)	587	\$39,573	3.5%	2.2%
61	Educational Services	574	\$47,702	1.9%	1.3%
54	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	439	\$85,692	9.2%	2.6%
56	Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	336	\$45,503	1.4%	2.1%
31	Manufacturing	313	\$61,491	2.4%	1.9%
92	Public Administration	305	\$63,228	3.4%	2.0%
52	Finance and Insurance	269	\$78,906	-0.8%	2.1%
53	Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	171	\$44,595	-1.0%	2.0%

<sup>1</sup> Source: JobsEQ: Data as of 2025Q1; Note: Figures may not sum due to rounding. All data based upon a four-quarter moving average. Exits and transfers are approximate estimates based upon occupation separation rates.

NAICS	Eustis, Florida	Total Sector Employment	Average Annual Wages	5-Year HISTORIC	5-Year FORECAST
71	Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	83	\$32,098	2.6%	2.5%
51	Information	63	\$101,144	6.7%	2.4%
42	Wholesale Trade	56	\$65,336	-2.2%	2.0%
22	Utilities	55	\$86,691	-1.9%	2.7%
48	Transportation and Warehousing	55	\$49,119	-16.2%	2.2%
55	Management of Companies and Enterprises	28	\$78,385	4.2%	2.4%
11	Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	13	\$38,443	-22.3%	1.6%
99	Unclassified	9	\$49,413	4.2%	2.1%
	<b>Total - All Industries</b>	<b>8,371</b>	<b>\$52,270</b>	<b>1.8%</b>	<b>2.0%</b>

### WHAT THE DATA TELLS US.

The largest sector in Eustis, FL is Retail Trade, employing 1,643 workers. Following this are Health Care and Social Assistance (1,352 workers) and Accommodation and Food Services (1,303 workers).

Location Quotients (LQs) reveal sectors in the region with higher concentrations of employment compared to the national average. The sectors with the largest LQs in Eustis, FL are:

- **Retail Trade** (LQ = 2.03)
- **Accommodation and Food Services** (LQ = 1.79)
- **Other Services (except Public Administration)** (LQ = 1.64)

These industries have a stronger local presence than the national average.

The sectors with the highest average wages per worker in Eustis, FL are:

- **Information:** \$101,144
- **Utilities:** \$86,691
- **Professional, Scientific and Technical Services:** \$85,692

Over the past five years, the sectors in Eustis, FL with the most significant job growth (or smallest losses) have been:

- **Retail Trade:** +222 jobs
- **Construction:** +170 jobs
- **Professional, Scientific and Technical Services:** +156 jobs

Looking ahead, employment in Eustis, FL is projected to increase by 891 jobs over the next five years. The fastest growing sector is expected to be Health Care and Social Services, with a year-over-year growth rate of +2.4%. The sectors projected to see the greatest job gains during this period are:

- **Health Care and Social Assistance:** +167 jobs
- **Accommodation and Food Service:** +147 jobs
- **Retail Trade:** +132 jobs

Forecasting (projections) is a technique that uses historical data as inputs to make informed estimates that are predictive in determining the direction of future trends. The forecasts are just that, forecasts. They do not account for the activities undertaken by the City of Eustis, community and region to influence the projections nor does it consider the impacts from the closing. VisionFirst utilizes data to provide insight as to how the community and region are seen by site selectors and offers the data as a benchmark for measuring the success of activities undertaken.

## Occupation Snapshot

Occupation wages differ from the industry wages listed previously because of differences in the definition which result in varying estimates. Industry wages include bonuses, stock options, severance pay, profit distributions, etc. and sometimes employer contributions to 401(k) plans – which are not included in occupation wages.

The top five occupations in the City of Eustis collectively represent **50.6%** of total employment. Notably, of these top occupations, **Management (\$112,300)**, has a wage significantly higher than the city mean wage of **\$55,100**.

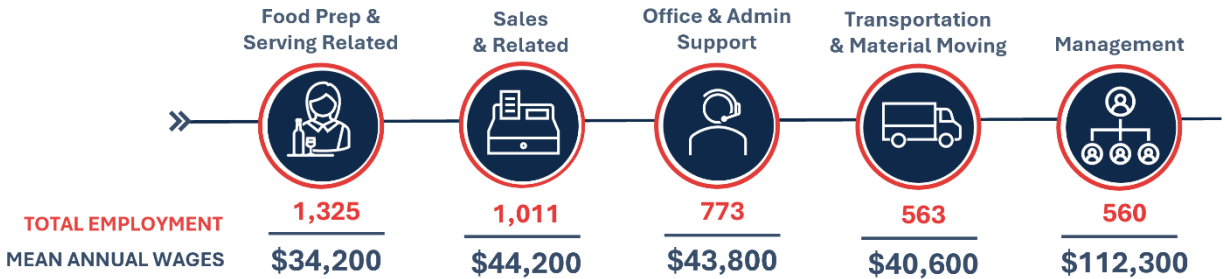


FIGURE 3: OCCUPATION SNAPSHOT (2025Q1)<sup>2</sup>

SOC	Occupation	Current					5-Year HISTORIC	5-Year FORECAST
		Empl	Mean Ann Wages <sup>2</sup>	LQ	Unempl	Unempl Rate	Ann %	Ann % Growth
35	Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations	1,325	\$34,200	1.92	60	4.9%	1.8%	2.1%
41	Sales and Related Occupations	1,011	\$44,200	1.40	42	2.8%	1.8%	1.4%
43	Office and Administrative Support Occupations	773	\$43,800	0.81	32	1.4%	0.0%	1.3%
53	Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	563	\$40,600	0.79	46	5.4%	0.7%	2.2%
11	Management Occupations	560	\$112,300	0.84	9	4.6%	4.3%	2.4%
31	Healthcare Support Occupations	487	\$36,600	1.22	16	5.6%	0.4%	2.6%
47	Construction and Extraction Occupations	474	\$50,300	1.27	36	2.6%	4.7%	2.4%
29	Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations	464	\$94,000	0.92	6	1.3%	1.6%	2.5%
25	Educational Instruction and Library Occupations	445	\$48,300	0.98	7	2.4%	0.4%	1.5%
13	Business and Financial Operations Occupations	382	\$80,900	0.70	9	1.7%	4.2%	2.3%

<sup>2</sup> Source: JobsEQ. Data as of 2025Q1 unless noted otherwise. Figures may not sum due to rounding.

1. Data based on a four-quarter moving average unless noted otherwise. 2. Wage data represent the average for all Covered Employment 3. Data represent found online ads active within the last thirty days in the selected region.

		Current					5-Year HISTORIC	5-Year FORECAST
SOC	Occupation	Empl	Mean Ann Wages <sup>2</sup>	LQ	Unempl	Unempl Rate	Ann %	Ann % Growth
49	Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations	552	\$53,000	1.08	12	1.8%	2.5%	2.2%
37	Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations	522	\$36,900	1.16	23	3.3%	2.0%	2.1%
51	Production Occupations	519	\$42,800	0.60	17	3.0%	1.3%	1.8%
39	Personal Care and Service Occupations	398	\$35,300	1.23	11	3.0%	0.4%	2.4%
21	Community and Social Service Occupations	382	\$53,500	0.94	3	2.1%	-1.4%	2.5%
15	Computer and Mathematical Occupations	317	\$94,700	0.49	3	2.0%	7.5%	2.8%
33	Protective Service Occupations	261	\$52,100	0.71	6	2.0%	2.8%	1.8%
27	Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations	210	\$63,300	0.79	2	2.4%	2.8%	2.1%
17	Architecture and Engineering Occupations	206	\$88,300	0.48	1	1.5%	5.5%	2.5%
23	Legal Occupations	198	\$104,700	0.67	1	0.7%	1.6%	2.2%
19	Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations	161	\$75,600	0.42	0	n/a	3.3%	2.5%
45	Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations	80	\$32,900	0.20	5	4.5%	-15.0%	1.8%
	<b>Total - All Occupations</b>	<b>8,371</b>	<b>\$55,100</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1.8%</b>	<b>2.0%</b>

### WHAT THE DATA TELLS US.

The largest major occupation group in Eustis, FL is Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations, employing 1,325 workers. The next largest occupation groups in the city are Sales and Related Occupations (1,011 workers) and Office and Administrative Support Occupations (773 workers).

Location quotients (LQs) indicate the concentration of an occupation group in a region compared to the national average. The occupation groups with the highest LQs in Eustis, FL are:

- **Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations:** (LQ = 1.92)
- **Sales and Related Occupations:** (LQ = 1.40)
- **Construction and Extraction Occupations:** (LQ = 1.27)

These groups have a notably higher concentration of employment in the region than the national average.

In terms of average wages, the highest-paying occupation groups in the community are:

- **Management Occupations:** \$112,300
- **Legal Occupations:** \$104,700
- **Computer and Mathematical Occupations:** \$94,700

The unemployment rate in the region varied among the major groups from 0.7% among Legal Occupations to 4.5% among Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations.

Looking ahead, the fastest-growing occupation group in Eustis over the next five years is expected to be Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations, with a projected +2.1% growth year over year. The largest job gains over this period are expected in:

- **Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations:** +147 jobs
- **Sales and Related Occupations:** +74 jobs
- **Management Occupations:** +70 jobs

Additionally, the highest separation demand (due to retirements and worker transitions) is expected in:

- **Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations:** 1,394 jobs
- **Sales and Related Occupations:** 743 jobs
- **Office and Administrative Support Occupations:** 466 jobs

### **Why High LQ Industry Clusters Matter**

When an industry cluster has a Location Quotient (LQ) above 1.25, it signals a regional competitive advantage. This high concentration reflects specialized expertise, efficient supply chains, and a skilled labor force—all of which lead to:

- **Specialization & Innovation:** A strong LQ means critical mass—firms benefit from shared knowledge, technology, and best practices, driving innovation and productivity.
- **Increased Efficiency:** Proximity to suppliers, customers, and talent lowers production costs and enables economies of scale.
- **Attracting Investment:** Clusters with strong LQs are magnets for private and public investment due to their lower risk and established infrastructure.
- **Labor Market Strength:** Deep pools of industry-specific talent benefit both employers and workers through better job matches and higher wages.
- **Knowledge Spillovers:** Firms, universities, and research centers share insights, fueling continual growth and renewal within the cluster.
- **Economic Resilience:** Specialized clusters often rebound faster from downturns due to strong local networks and adaptability.
- **Sustained Regional Growth:** High-performing clusters drive entrepreneurship, attract new businesses, and support long-term economic development.

## A Closer Look at Participation Rates.

One of the key metrics analyzed in today's economy is the **labor force participation rate (LFPR)**. It is frequently cited but often not fully explained. Before diving into U.S. Census data, it is important to understand what the labor force participation rate includes, what it excludes, and why some experts believe it is so low.

**Definition:** The labor force participation rate reflects the proportion of the civilian non-institutional population (everyone aged 16 or older, excluding individuals in institutions such as prisons, nursing homes, mental hospitals, or those on active duty in the military).

When examining labor force participation from a national perspective:

### Overall Labor Force Participation Rate

- As of **May 2025**, the **seasonally adjusted LFPR** for ages 16+ stood at **62.4%**, unchanged from February but down from April's 62.6%
- This is about **4.9 percentage points below** its 2000 peak of 67.3%.

### Prime-Age Workers (25–54)

- Participation in this group remains strong at **83.4%** (May 2025), slightly below the post-pandemic high of 83.9% in summer 2024.
- Among men in this cohort, it's **89.2%** (down from 89.9%), and among women it's **77.7%**, both near two-decade highs.

### Gender & Education Gaps

- **Men (16+):** Participation in May was **67.7%**, a slight dip from April's 67.9%.
- **Women (16+):** At about 57.5% in February 2025 (coinciding overall rate), reflecting a persistent ~10-point gap.
- Workers with some college or associate degrees saw a dip from 63.6% (Feb) to **62.4%** in May.

### Impact of Aging Population

- Despite near-record prime-age participation, the **overall LFPR** is suppressed by population aging—more retirees—and **lower rates among older age groups**.

### COVID-19 Pandemic Effects

- Older workers: A notable spike in exits during the pandemic persists—echoing recent studies.
- Women: The pandemic initially drove many out of the workforce, but participation has rebounded, especially among prime-age.

### Recent Labor Market Signals

- Job growth slowed in May with only 139,000 new positions and falling LFPR concealing a decline of 696,000 in household employment.
- Private-sector job losses in June (-33,000) further indicate weakening momentum.
- While layoffs remain historically low, new hiring is the slowest in years.

## WHY IT MATTERS

- **Aging** continues to depress the headline rate—even as prime-age participation remains robust.
- A slowdown in hiring and flat-to-falling LFPR could signal underlying labor-market softness.
- The gender/education divides reflect ongoing structural disparities—non-college men lag significantly, while female participation has rebounded post-pandemic.

Metric	Latest Value	Trend
Overall LFPR	~62.4%	Stagnant, slightly down
Prime-age (25–54) LFPR	~83.4%	Near recent high
Male LFPR (16+)	~67.7%	Slight dip
Female LFPR (16+)	~57.5%	Gradual recovery

- **Aging population** remains a drag on overall participation.
- **Prime-age participation** is back to pre-pandemic trends.
- **Labor market slack:** decelerating hiring and soft employment indicators point to caution ahead.

# SWOT ANALYSIS + LEVERAGE POINTS.

Based on stakeholder engagement and data analysis, VisionFirst identified the City of Eustis' economic development strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This analysis relied on qualitative inputs as well as VisionFirst's experience in corporate site selection and state and local economic development.



## STRENGTHS

- Proximity to Orlando, plus HUBZone and Opportunity Zone designations, position Eustis for strategic growth.
- Lake Tech and Lake Sumter College offer customized training and are active partners in workforce development.
- City-owned land presents opportunities for commercial and mixed-use development.
- Community pride is strong, with support for beautification, arts, and heritage tourism.
- City staff are respected for their dedication and ability to deliver with limited resources.



## WEAKNESSES

- Strategic planning efforts have stalled, and leadership is seen as reactive.
- Public engagement is low, especially among younger and underserved residents.
- Lack of zoning tools and annexation strategy limits development readiness.
- Local schools face performance and staffing issues, particularly in East Eustis.
- Infrastructure challenges include traffic congestion, CUP limitations, and limited affordable housing.



## OPPORTUNITIES

- Strong interest in clean industries like tech, aerospace, AgTech, and healthcare logistics.
- Business incubator is attracting international attention and could anchor innovation.
- Infill and redevelopment potential around lakes and city-owned parcels.
- Stakeholder support for youth programs, STEAM education, and creative economy training.
- Downtown revitalization could support boutique retail, hospitality, and entertainment.



## THREATS

- Cultural resistance to growth and influence of legacy networks may stall progress.
- County opposition to annexation and lack of coordination complicate planning.
- Economic leakage persists, with many residents commuting out for work.
- Jurisdictional boundaries and unclear land control hinder infill development.
- Disconnected youth and underutilized talent pose long-term workforce risks.

## LEVERAGE POINTS

Far too often SWOT analyses are conducted for discovery purposes only. VisionFirst goes beyond the initial step of conducting the analysis and develops strategies to leverage or capitalize on opportunities to minimize or mitigate weaknesses.

These strategies, or “leverage points,” highlight the most urgent and impactful actions the economic development team should consider to strengthen its position, fulfill its mission and enhance the city’s competitiveness for jobs and investment.

STRENGTHS	LEVERAGE POINTS
Proximity to Orlando, plus HUBZone and Opportunity Zone designations, position Eustis for strategic growth.	Promote these designations to attract federal contractors and small business investment.
Community pride is strong, with support for beautification, arts, and heritage tourism.	Build on efforts like Eustis in Bloom to support placemaking and downtown revitalization.
WEAKNESSES	LEVERAGE POINTS
Strategic planning efforts have stalled, and leadership is seen as reactive.	Restart the strategic planning process to provide clear direction and unify leadership.
Public engagement is low, especially among younger and underserved residents.	Use targeted outreach (e.g., churches, schools, pop-ups) to engage broader demographics.
Infrastructure challenges include traffic congestion, CUP limitations, and limited affordable housing.	Prioritize infrastructure upgrades in key areas to support smart growth and housing access.
OPPORTUNITIES	LEVERAGE POINTS
Business incubator is attracting international attention and could anchor innovation.	Position the incubator as a regional innovation anchor and promote its global reach.
Strong interest in clean industries like tech, aerospace, AgTech, and healthcare logistics.	Market Eustis as a clean industry hub and align incentives with target sectors.
THREATS	LEVERAGE POINTS
Cultural resistance to growth and influence of legacy networks may stall progress.	Engage long-term residents early in planning to build trust and reduce opposition.
County opposition to annexation and lack of coordination complicate planning.	Strengthen intergovernmental relationships and advocate for shared priorities.

## RECOMMENDED TARGET INDUSTRIES.

Focusing on the right industries is an important step in helping Eustis grow in a way that reflects its values, strengths, and long-term goals. Just as a business identifies its target market to guide decisions and use resources wisely, a community benefits from concentrating its efforts on industries it is best positioned to support. This section outlines five industry sectors that offer the most potential for Eustis to explore and attract.

These recommendations are based on a combination of local assets, workforce capacity, infrastructure readiness, and broader market trends. They are not meant to cover every possible opportunity but instead offer a practical starting point for where the city can focus its efforts and see the greatest return.

Two of these industries, data centers and food processing, have already been identified as areas of interest. While each comes with its own set of considerations, they also offer clear advantages that make them worth continued attention. The remaining three were selected through a review of economic and workforce data, conversations with local stakeholders, and an understanding of what types of businesses are most likely to succeed in the current environment.

It is important to note that these five industries are not the only ones the city can pursue. Eustis should remain open to opportunities that fall outside of these categories, especially when a project aligns with community goals and can be supported with available resources. However, having a defined set of targets helps guide outreach, shape messaging, and ensure that limited time and resources are used effectively.

The five recommended target industries for Eustis' consideration are:

- 1. Food Processing/Manufacturing**
- 2. Information Technology**
- 3. Distribution**
- 4. Aerospace Manufacturing**
- 5. AgTech/Agribusiness**

Together, these five industries offer a clear and realistic path forward for Eustis. They reflect where the city is best positioned to compete and where it can build momentum over time. While this focus helps guide outreach and investment, it does not limit the city's ability to consider other opportunities. Eustis should remain open to projects that align with its goals and values, even if they fall outside of these categories. What this framework provides is a sense of direction, one that supports more intentional decision-making and helps the city tell a stronger story to potential partners and employers.

# Food Processing/Manufacturing

## Strategic Fit for Eustis:

Food Processing/Manufacturing (NAICS 311) food manufacturing is already present in Eustis with 96 jobs and a location quotient of 1.05, indicating a slightly higher concentration than the national average. Regionally, the 45-minute drive-time area supports approximately 6,500 food manufacturing jobs, highlighting a broader ecosystem that can reinforce local growth and supply chain connectivity. The sector includes a mix of small-scale and mid-sized operations, and even some entrepreneurial activity, with 8.6% of employment coming from self-employment.

As an essential industry, food manufacturing plays a critical role in supporting both local and regional supply chains. Its presence contributes to economic stability and public well-being, making it a valuable component of a diversified and resilient economy.

## Drivers:

### Growing demand for processed and specialty foods

- Across the country and region, more people are consuming packaged, ready-to-eat, and specialty food products. This steady demand supports a wide range of food manufacturing operations, from snack foods to health-conscious alternatives.

### Shift toward domestic production after COVID

- The pandemic highlighted the risks of relying on global supply chains. As a result, many companies are bringing food production closer to home, creating opportunities for communities like Eustis to support regional supply chain resilience.

### Advancements in technology and food safety

- Modern food manufacturing is becoming more efficient thanks to automation, robotics, and digital quality control systems. These tools help reduce labor needs and improve compliance with safety standards, making it easier for smaller communities to support high-quality operations.

### Changing consumer preferences

- Consumers are increasingly looking for healthier, plant-based, and locally sourced food options. This shift creates opportunity for small and mid-sized producers to meet evolving market demands, especially in areas with access to regional distribution networks.

## Opportunities:

Water availability is a key consideration for food processing operations in Eustis. While the city has access to water, it is a carefully managed resource, and there is a clear desire to avoid overextending capacity. This makes it important to focus on food manufacturing operations that **use less water**.

Several types of food manufacturing are well-suited to these constraints:

- **Dry Food Processing:** Snack foods (chips, pretzels, popcorn), cereals, crackers, cookies, and powdered products like spices or baking mixes typically require minimal water.
- **Frozen & Refrigerated Foods:** Frozen meals and vegetables, especially when blanching is minimized or water is recycled, and plant-based dairy alternatives.
- **Specialty & Artisan Foods:** Chocolate and dry confectionery, nut roasting, and jerky production are relatively low in water use.

- **Packaging & Assembly Operations:** Co-packing and repackaging of dry goods involve little to no water usage.

### **How Eustis Stands Out:**

- Food manufacturing employment in Eustis has grown at an average annual rate of 12.6% over the past ten years, significantly outpacing the national rate of 1.8%. Within a 45-minute drive of the city, regional employment in the sector has also increased by a healthy 2.7% each year, suggesting strong and sustained momentum across the broader area.
- Wages in the sector have increased by 5.1% per year, outpacing the national average of 3.5%, contributing to rising household incomes.
- The average wage for food manufacturing in Eustis is \$60,816, slightly below the national average of \$61,118. This offers a cost advantage for employers while remaining competitive for workers.
- The local and regional workforce includes individuals with experience in key food manufacturing roles such as machine operators, bakers, batchmakers, and supervisors. Across the broader drive-time area, the talent pool is especially strong, with more than 1,000 bakers, 618 packaging machine operators, and 329 batchmakers employed in top occupations.
- Lake Technical College offers programs aligned with industry needs, including Baking and Pastry Arts, helping to build a pipeline of skilled talent.
- The graphic provided on the following page illustrates relationships and potential movement between occupations that share similar skill sets, with flows from entry-level roles to more specialized positions. Developing career pathways as a strategy promotes industry employment growth and workforce engagement, helping workers advance while supporting employer needs.

### **Strategic Considerations:**

- For targeted and proactive recruitment in food processing and manufacturing, Eustis should consider participating in key industry events. These can be attended independently or as part of a regional presence in collaboration with Lake County, LEAD, or the Florida Department of Commerce.
- Attending trade shows and conferences allows Eustis to showcase its workforce assets, infrastructure, and business climate directly to decision-makers in the food industry.
- These events offer valuable opportunities to build relationships, generate leads, and stay informed about industry trends and innovations.

### **Industry Events for Recruitment:**

While attending industry events can be valuable, Eustis should take a thoughtful and selective approach. Rather than participating in every opportunity, the city might consider attending one key event each year, ideally one that aligns with its target industries or strategic goals. These events offer more than just recruitment potential; they provide insight into emerging trends, technologies, and evolving business needs.

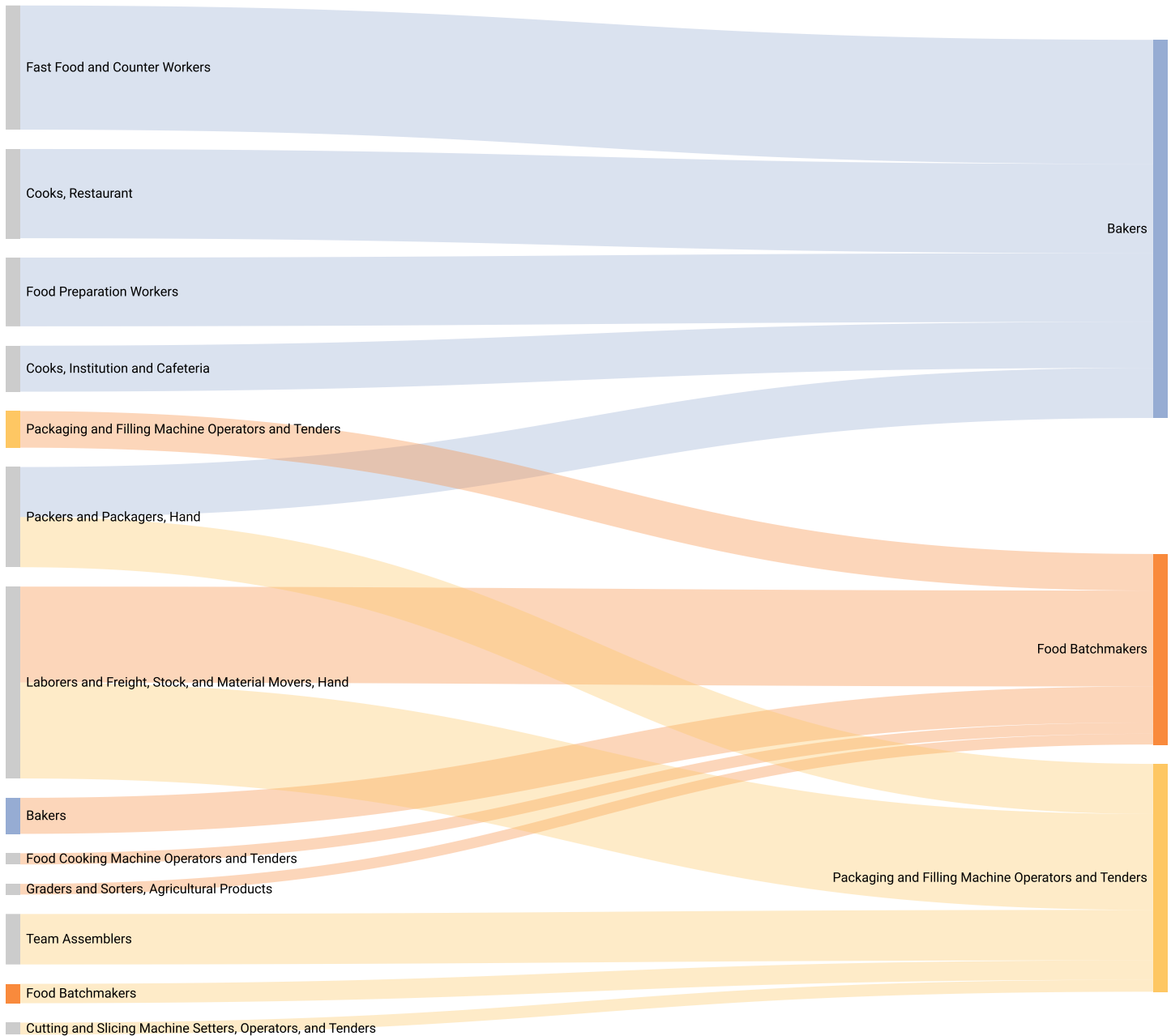
After each event, conducting a post-event review to assess outcomes, such as connections made, leads generated, and knowledge gained, can help determine the return on investment and guide future participation. **This strategic framework should be applied consistently to all industry event lists provided throughout this report.**

- **International Production & Processing Expo (IPPE)** (Jan 27–29, 2026, Atlanta, GA): One of the largest food processing expos in the U.S., covering feed, meat, and poultry sectors.
- **Natural Products Expo West** (Mar 3–6, 2026, Anaheim, CA): Major event for organic and health-focused food brands.
- **Future Food-Tech Summit** (Mar 19–20, 2026, San Francisco, CA): Focused on innovation and sustainability in food production.
- **Food Northwest Process & Packaging Expo** (Apr 20–21, 2026, Portland, OR): Largest regional food manufacturing trade show in the U.S., with a focus on automation and sustainability.
- **GroceryLab** (Jun 2–4, 2026, Detroit, MI): A co-creation forum for food retailers, technologists, and operators focused on innovation and collaboration.

Eustis presents a strong opportunity for food manufacturing investment, especially in operations that align with the city's approach to resource stewardship. The sector's consistent growth, rising wages, and entrepreneurial activity reflect a healthy business climate. With continued support for workforce development and a focus on efficient production methods, Eustis can attract companies that contribute to a resilient economy while respecting local infrastructure and environmental priorities.

## Sector Strategy Pathways

The graphic below shows how occupations with similar skill sets are connected and how individuals may move between them over time. Using career pathways as a strategy can help grow industry employment and increase workforce participation by guiding workers toward opportunities that match their skills and interests.



## Information Technology (Inclusive of Data Centers)

### Strategic Fit for Eustis:

The Information Technology sector (NAICS 51) currently employs 63 people in Eustis, with a location quotient of 0.40, indicating a lower concentration than the national average. However, within this sector, Web Search Portals, Libraries, Archives, and Other Information Services stand out with a location quotient of 1.60, suggesting regional strength and potential for growth. Regionally, the 45-minute drive time area supports 22,006 jobs in the Information Technology sector, with a location quotient of 1.00, matching the national average and indicating a balanced concentration across the broader area.

This target industry includes data centers, which were consistently identified as a priority during stakeholder engagement. Data centers represent a strategic opportunity for Eustis to attract high-value investment in digital infrastructure. As companies seek secure, scalable, and cost-effective locations outside major metros, Eustis offers a compelling alternative with proximity to Orlando's tech ecosystem and a lower cost profile.

While overall employment in the sector has declined by 8.6% over the past ten years, wages have increased by 8.7% annually, reaching an average of \$101,144. This wage growth reflects the presence of high-value roles and signals potential for upward mobility. Entrepreneurial activity is also notable, with 15.1% of employment coming from self-employment, pointing to a foundation of innovation and flexibility that can support future growth in digital services and infrastructure.

### Drivers:

#### Rising demand for cloud services and data storage

- The growth of digital content, e-commerce, and remote work continues to drive demand for secure and scalable data infrastructure. Communities with available land, reliable power, and fiber connectivity are well-positioned to attract investment.

#### Decentralization of data infrastructure

- Companies are increasingly locating data centers outside major urban areas to reduce costs and improve redundancy. Eustis offers access to regional assets while maintaining a business-friendly environment.

#### Growth in AI and machine learning applications

- These technologies require significant computing power and data storage, creating demand for facilities that can support high-performance computing environments.

#### Cybersecurity and data compliance needs

- As regulations around data privacy and security expand, businesses seek locations with workforce training and infrastructure that support secure operations.

### Opportunities:

Just like Food Processing/Manufacturing, water availability is a key consideration for data center operations in Eustis. Although water is available to the city, it's a tightly managed resource. This underscores the importance of exploring data center models that use less water, like air-cooled systems or other low-water cooling technologies.

Power reliability is also a critical factor. While large hyperscale data centers may exceed local capacity, several types of data center operations may be well-suited to Eustis's infrastructure constraints:

- **Edge Data Centers:** These smaller facilities support localized computing needs and typically require less water and power. They are ideal for supporting regional users and applications with low latency requirements.
- **Modular and Containerized Data Centers:** Pre-fabricated and scalable, these units can be deployed quickly and operate efficiently with lower resource demands.
- **Enterprise Data Centers:** Built to serve individual companies, these facilities are generally smaller than hyperscale centers and can be tailored to available infrastructure.
- **Colocation Facilities:** Shared data centers that host multiple clients offer flexibility and efficiency, often with lower environmental impact than larger standalone operations.

### How Eustis Stands Out:

- Wage growth in the sector has averaged 8.7% annually, well above the national rate of 6.8%.
- Entrepreneurial activity is strong, with 15.1% of employment coming from self-employment.
- Key occupations such as Software Developers (\$154,200 average wage), Sales Representatives, and Telecommunications Installers are already present in the local workforce.
- The average wage for Information Technology sector workers in Eustis is \$101,144, compared to \$166,186 nationally. This wage differential offers a cost-effective location for employers, especially when compared to neighboring major metros, while still remaining competitive for workers.
- Lake Technical College offers programs aligned with industry needs, including Cloud Computing and Network/System Administration, helping to build a pipeline of skilled talent.
- The regional presence of 1,098 Telecommunications Equipment Installers and 498 User Support Specialists supports the operational needs of data centers and digital services.
- The city's inland location may be seen as a competitive advantage in Florida, where the risk of natural disasters such as hurricanes is a concern in the site selection process for data centers. Eustis offers geographic stability that can appeal to companies prioritizing operational continuity and disaster resilience.

### Strategic Considerations:

For targeted and proactive recruitment in the Information Technology sector, particularly data centers and digital infrastructure, Eustis should consider a multi-pronged approach that highlights its workforce, infrastructure, and business climate.

- Strategic partnerships with utilities and broadband providers can help Eustis meet industry expectations for power reliability and fiber connectivity, which are essential for data center operations.
- Eustis should explore regional partnerships to market itself as a secondary data center location for companies based in Orlando or Tampa.
- Participation in tech and infrastructure-focused events can help build visibility and attract investment.

- Consider developing a technology park or innovation zone with infrastructure tailored to data and digital services.
- Web Search Portals and Information Services already employ 27 people locally, with a strong location quotient of 1.60 and average wages of \$207,914, indicating high-value activity and potential for expansion.
- Lake Technical College offers programs aligned with industry needs, including Cloud Computing and Network/System Administration, helping to build a pipeline of skilled talent.

These considerations position Eustis to attract companies that value cost-efficiency, workforce readiness, and proximity to major tech hubs, while also aligning with the city's approach to resource stewardship and infrastructure planning.

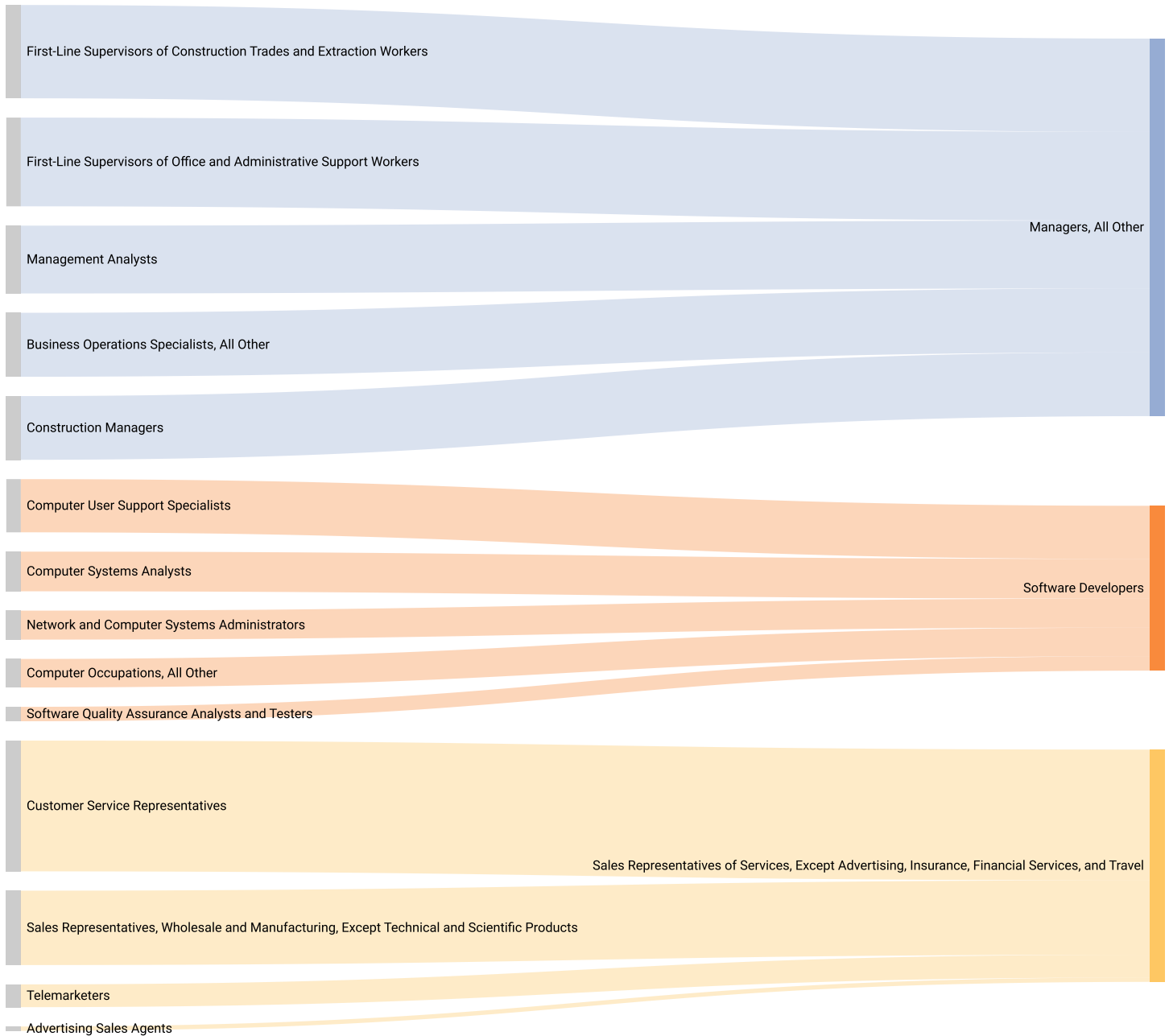
### **Industry Events for Recruitment:**

- **Data Center World** (March 16–19, 2026, Washington, D.C.): Focused on infrastructure, operations, and strategy for data centers.
- **InfraGard National Congress & Technology Showcase** (May 2026, Las Vegas, NV): Covers cybersecurity and critical infrastructure protection.
- **Florida Technology Summit** (Fall 2026, Orlando, FL): Regional event focused on IT, cloud, and data services.
- **AI & Big Data Expo North America** (November 2026, Santa Clara, CA): Highlights trends in data analytics, cloud, and infrastructure.

Eustis offers a promising environment for growth in the Information Technology sector, particularly in data centers and digital services. With rising wages, a developing pipeline of skilled talent, and a foundation of entrepreneurial activity, the city is well-positioned to appeal to companies seeking cost-effective locations with access to regional infrastructure and proximity to major tech hubs.

## Sector Strategy Pathways

The graphic below shows how occupations with similar skill sets are connected and how individuals may move between them over time. Using career pathways as a strategy can help grow industry employment and increase workforce participation by guiding workers toward opportunities that match their skills and interests.



## Distribution

### Strategic Fit for Eustis:

Distribution, classified under Transportation and Warehousing (NAICS 48 and 49), was identified as a priority industry during stakeholder engagement. While Eustis currently has a small employment base in this sector with 55 jobs and a location quotient of 0.13, the broader 45-minute drive-time area supports approximately 52,443 jobs. This regional activity reflects a more developed ecosystem that may offer opportunities for Eustis to participate in supply chain operations and benefit from proximity to established infrastructure and talent.

Though the city is still emerging in the distribution sector, its favorable location and access to skilled labor and training resources suggest strong potential for strategic advancement. With thoughtful planning and strategic partnerships, Eustis may be able to support niche distribution operations that complement regional activity.

### Drivers:

#### Expansion of E-Commerce and Delivery Services

- The continued rise of e-commerce has increased demand for distribution services, particularly in communities that can support fulfillment, delivery, and reverse logistics. Eustis may be able to capture niche opportunities in this space.

#### Stakeholder Prioritization

- During stakeholder engagement, Distribution was mentioned as a target industry of interest several times. Participants expressed interest in leveraging Eustis's location and infrastructure to support regional supply chains and attract new investment.

#### Regional Growth and Demand

- The 45-minute drive-time area has experienced strong growth in distribution employment. More than 6,500 positions are expected to be in demand annually, driven by both industry expansion and workforce turnover.

#### Workforce and Training Pipeline

- The region includes a deep talent pool with thousands of workers in key distribution roles. These include more than 8,700 heavy truck drivers, nearly 7,000 freight and material movers, and over 4,700 light truck drivers. Postsecondary institutions such as Lake Technical College, Valencia College, and Universal Technical Institute offer programs in truck technology, diesel mechanics, operations management, and entrepreneurship, helping to build a pipeline of future workers.

### Opportunities:

Eustis may be able to support distribution operations that align with its existing infrastructure, workforce and scale. These include:

- **Last-mile and regional delivery:** Small distribution firms focused on serving Central Florida's consumer base may find Eustis a viable location for operations.
- **Fleet services and maintenance:** Training programs and skilled mechanics support opportunities for vehicle maintenance and fleet operations.
- **Entrepreneurial distribution activity:** Self-employment accounts for 14.4% of regional employment in the sector, suggesting a strong base of independent operators and small businesses.

- **Support services for manufacturing:** Distribution operations that serve food manufacturing and other local industries, such as packaging, cold storage, and inventory management, may benefit from co-location and shared resources.

### How Eustis Stands Out:

- While current employment in distribution is limited, Eustis is located near major transportation corridors and regional hubs, offering potential advantages for small-scale operations.
- The regional labor pool includes more than 8,700 heavy truck drivers, 6,980 freight and material movers, and 4,700 light truck drivers, supported by a variety of training programs.
- Average wages in the sector are approximately \$54,908, below the national average of \$66,104, offering a cost advantage for employers.
- Educational institutions across the region offer relevant programs in vehicle maintenance, operations management, and business administration, supporting both entry-level and advanced workforce needs.
- The graphic provided on the following page illustrates relationships and potential movement between occupations that share similar skill sets, with flows from entry-level roles to more specialized positions. Developing career pathways as a strategy promotes industry employment growth and workforce engagement, helping workers advance while supporting employer needs.

### Strategic Considerations:

- Not every major community surrounding Eustis will be able to accommodate every distribution project that comes their way. Through regional partnerships and consistent messaging, Eustis may be able to position itself as a referred location, helping to keep projects within the region even if they are not a direct fit for other communities.
- For targeted and proactive recruitment in distribution, Eustis should consider participating in key industry events. These can be attended independently or as part of a regional presence in collaboration with Lake County, LEAD, or the Florida Department of Commerce.
- Attending trade shows and conferences allows Eustis to showcase its workforce assets, infrastructure, and business climate directly to decision-makers in the distribution industry.
- These events offer valuable opportunities to build relationships, generate leads, and stay informed about industry trends and innovations.

### Strategic Considerations:

- **Modex** (March 9–12, 2026, Atlanta, GA): One of the largest supply chain and distribution expos in North America, focused on material handling, logistics, and automation.
- **Home Delivery World** (June 3–4, 2026, Philadelphia, PA): A major event focused on last-mile delivery, e-commerce logistics, and retail supply chains.
- **CSCMP EDGE Conference** (September 20–23, 2026, Orlando, FL): Hosted by the Council of Supply Chain Management Professionals, this event covers trends in distribution, transportation, and supply chain strategy.
- **Parcel Forum** (October 2026, Chicago, IL): Focused on shipping, fulfillment, and delivery operations for small to mid-sized distribution firms.

- **Florida Supply Chain Summit** (Date TBD, Florida): A regional event that brings together supply chain professionals, economic developers, and logistics firms to discuss opportunities and challenges across Florida.

Eustis may not currently be a major player in the distribution sector, but its proximity to regional activity, access to workforce and training assets, and stakeholder interest suggest potential for growth. With continued support for workforce development and a focus on targeted opportunities, the city can begin to build its presence in the distribution industry in a way that complements its infrastructure and economic priorities.

### Sector Strategy Pathways:

The graphic below shows how occupations with similar skill sets are connected and how individuals may move between them over time. Using career pathways as a strategy can help grow industry employment and increase workforce participation by guiding workers toward opportunities that match their skills and interests.



# Aerospace Manufacturing

## Strategic Fit for Eustis:

Aerospace Manufacturing, which falls under the broader Transportation Equipment Manufacturing sector (NAICS 336), was identified as a potential target industry during stakeholder engagement. While Eustis itself has very limited activity in this sector, just 5 jobs and a location quotient of 0.06, the broader 45-minute drive-time region supports more than 7,100 jobs, including aerospace engineers, aircraft mechanics, and systems assemblers. This regional strength, combined with Florida's statewide leadership in aerospace, suggests that Eustis may be able to play a supporting role in the sector's continued growth.

As a lower-cost alternative to major metro areas, Eustis could offer value to aerospace firms seeking expansion opportunities outside of high-cost urban centers. Like Distribution, with access to regional talent, training programs, and infrastructure, the city may be able to attract niche operations or serve as a referral location for projects that do not fit elsewhere in the region.

## Drivers:

### Florida's statewide strength in aerospace

- Florida is home to a robust aerospace ecosystem, including major manufacturers, defense contractors, and space industry leaders. This statewide presence creates opportunities for smaller communities to support supply chain activity and workforce development.

### Emergence of advanced air mobility and space commercialization

- Technologies such as electric vertical takeoff and landing (eVTOL) aircraft, drones, and satellite systems are reshaping the aerospace landscape. Commercial space ventures and government initiatives are accelerating innovation and creating new market segments.

### Defense sector expansion

- Geopolitical tensions and national security priorities are fueling increased defense spending worldwide. Aerospace manufacturers are scaling up to meet demand for military aircraft, unmanned systems, and advanced defense technologies.

### Emergence of advanced air mobility and space commercialization

- Technologies such as electric vertical takeoff and landing (eVTOL) aircraft, drones, and satellite systems are reshaping the aerospace landscape. Commercial space ventures and government initiatives are accelerating innovation and creating new market segments.

## Opportunities:

Although Eustis is not currently a center for aerospace manufacturing, there are several niche opportunities that may align with the city's scale, cost profile, and regional position:

- **Component and subassembly manufacturing:** Small-scale operations focused on producing specific aerospace components such as brackets, wiring harnesses, or composite parts may find Eustis attractive due to lower costs and access to regional talent.
- **Precision machining and fabrication:** With access to regional machinists and welders, Eustis could support firms specializing in CNC machining, metalworking, or fiberglass fabrication for aerospace applications.

- **Maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) support:** While full-scale MRO operations may be better suited to larger airports, Eustis could support satellite services such as parts refurbishment, avionics testing, or component inspection.
- **Engineering and quality assurance services:** Small firms providing design validation, testing, or compliance support could locate in Eustis to serve larger aerospace manufacturers in the region.
- **Tooling and fixtures production:** Manufacturers of jigs, molds, and fixtures used in aerospace assembly may benefit from Eustis's lower cost environment and skilled trades access.
- **Supplier consolidation and logistics support:** Eustis could serve as a location for supplier coordination, packaging, or distribution of aerospace parts, especially for firms streamlining regional supply chains.
- **Training and workforce development partnerships:**

### **How Eustis Stands Out:**

- Although local employment is limited, Eustis is located near a region with more than 7,100 transportation equipment manufacturing jobs, including hundreds in aerospace-specific roles.
- Regional wages in the sector are significantly higher than the national average, indicating the presence of advanced and specialized operations.
- Postsecondary institutions offer relevant programs in aircraft maintenance, welding, engineering, and operations, supporting both entry-level and advanced workforce needs.
- Entrepreneurial activity is present, with 2.1% of regional employment in the sector coming from self-employment.

### **Strategic Considerations:**

- Florida's reputation in aerospace can be leveraged to position Eustis as a cost-effective alternative for firms seeking expansion outside of major metros.
- Through regional collaboration and consistent messaging, Eustis may be able to attract projects that may not fit in larger communities but still benefit from remaining within the Central Florida region.
- Eustis should consider participating in aerospace and advanced manufacturing industry events, either independently or as part of a regional presence with Lake County, LEAD, or the Florida Department of Commerce.
- These events provide opportunities to showcase workforce assets, infrastructure, and business climate directly to decision-makers in the aerospace industry.
- With institutions like Lake Technical College and the Aviation Institute of Maintenance nearby, Eustis could host training centers or apprenticeship programs in partnership with regional employers.

### Industry Events for Recruitment:

- **Aerospace and Defense Supplier Summit** (April 2026, Seattle, WA): Focused on supply chain partnerships and procurement for aerospace manufacturers.
- **SpaceCom** (May 2026, Orlando, FL): A major event for commercial space and aerospace innovation, held in Florida.
- **Farnborough International Airshow** (July 2026, UK): One of the largest global aerospace events, with strong participation from U.S. firms.
- **Florida Manufacturing and Supply Chain Summit** (Date TBD, Florida): A regional event focused on advanced manufacturing, supply chain, and workforce development.
- **National Aerospace Technology Conference** (Date TBD): Covers aerospace innovation, engineering, and manufacturing trends.

Positioning Eustis within the aerospace manufacturing landscape will require a strategic blend of regional collaboration, targeted outreach, and workforce alignment. By leveraging Florida's reputation, participating in industry events, and cultivating partnerships with training providers, Eustis can begin to build visibility and credibility in the sector. While the city may not be a primary destination for large-scale aerospace operations, it can play a meaningful role in supporting the broader regional ecosystem and attracting projects that benefit from its cost advantages and proximity to talent.

## Agribusiness/AgTech

### Strategic Fit for Eustis:

Agribusiness and AgTech are gaining attention as transformative sectors for rural and regional economies. While the term "AgTech" is widely used, it's not always clearly defined. Many components of the industry span multiple sectors—agriculture, manufacturing, logistics, and technology, which can make it difficult to capture through a single data source. Traditional industry classification systems like NAICS codes often miss the full scope of AgTech, especially when it comes to value-added activities such as food processing, equipment manufacturing, and precision farming technologies.

In Eustis, the Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting sector employs 13 people, with a location quotient of 0.13, indicating a much lower concentration than the national average. However, 81.6% of this employment is self-employment, pointing to a strong entrepreneurial base. The average wage in the sector is \$38,443, which is below the national average of \$53,359, but high-wage roles like Agricultural Managers earn \$98,700 annually.

Across the broader 45-minute drive time region, the sector supports 8,004 jobs with a location quotient of 0.57. While employment has remained relatively flat over the past decade, wages have grown by 4.9% annually, outpacing national trends. The average wage in the region is \$43,608, and the sector generates 1,106 annual job openings with a projected growth rate of 1.5% per year.

Complementing this is the Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services sector (NAICS 541), which includes many AgTech-related activities such as biotechnology, engineering, and R&D. In Eustis, this sector employs 439 people with a location quotient of 0.72 and an average wage of \$85,692. Employment has grown by 6.2% annually over the past decade, and wages have increased by 6.8% annually. Regionally, the sector supports 86,940 jobs with a location quotient of 1.04, average wages of \$103,178, and a projected annual growth rate of 1.8%.

The regional workforce includes more than 2,400 agricultural managers, over 2,500 farmworkers, and 3,400 software developers, creating a strong foundation for AgTech innovation. Postsecondary institutions such as Valencia College, Seminole State College, and Lake Technical College offer programs in biotechnology, cloud computing, network administration, diesel mechanics, and entrepreneurship, all of which align with the needs of modern agriculture.

### Drivers:

#### Technology is transforming agriculture

- Automation, data analytics, and precision tools are reshaping how farms operate. These innovations improve efficiency, reduce resource use, and support sustainable practices across the agricultural value chain.

#### Climate and crop challenges are accelerating innovation

- Issues like citrus greening, hurricane damage, and shifting weather patterns are driving demand for resilient farming solutions. AgTech offers tools for disease detection, adaptive crop management, and controlled environment agriculture.

#### Value-added agriculture is expanding

- Activities such as food processing, packaging, and specialty crop production are creating new opportunities beyond traditional farming. These often fall under manufacturing and logistics sectors, highlighting the cross-sector nature of AgTech.

### Entrepreneurial activity is strong

- High levels of self-employment in both agriculture and technical services point to a culture of innovation. This entrepreneurial momentum supports the growth of small-scale AgTech ventures and niche agricultural businesses.

### Federal and state support is increasing

- Programs from USDA, SBA, and state agencies are investing in AgTech, especially in rural and HUBZone communities like Eustis. These resources can help local businesses scale and attract outside investment.

### Opportunities:

Eustis may not currently be known for AgTech innovation, but its unique characteristics and regional strengths suggest meaningful opportunities for growth in targeted areas such as:

- **AgTech-focused programming within existing incubator infrastructure:** Eustis already hosts a business incubator with proven success, which provides a strong foundation for supporting startups. By layering in targeted programming, mentorship, and partnerships specific to agricultural technology, the city can position itself as a launchpad for innovation in precision agriculture, automation, and sustainable farming solutions.
- **Controlled environment agriculture (CEA):** Vertical farms, hydroponics, and greenhouse operations offer scalable, climate-resilient solutions that reduce dependence on traditional crop cycles. **These systems are also highly water-efficient, using up to 90% less water than conventional farming through closed-loop irrigation and precise nutrient delivery.** CEA models are well suited to Eustis's available land and infrastructure and align with the city's commitment to sustainable resource management.
- **Smart equipment and IoT manufacturing:** With access to regional talent in diesel mechanics, fabrication, and technical trades, Eustis could support small-scale production of smart farming tools, sensors, and automated machinery.
- **Agri-tourism and specialty crop ventures:** The city's natural assets and entrepreneurial spirit support niche markets such as organic farming, farm-to-table experiences, and experiential tourism. These ventures can diversify the local economy while enhancing community identity.

### How Eustis Stands Out:

- The city's HUBZone designation opens doors to federal funding and contracting opportunities, making it an attractive location for startups and companies looking to scale.
- Eustis has a strong entrepreneurial spirit, with more than 80% of its agricultural employment coming from self-employed individuals. This foundation supports innovation and small-scale ventures, which are often key drivers in emerging industries like AgTech.
- The surrounding region offers a deep talent pool, with over 8,000 people working in agriculture and nearly 87,000 in professional and technical services. This mix of hands-on experience and technical expertise creates a unique opportunity for cross-sector collaboration.
- Wages in both sectors are rising faster than the national average, signaling growing demand for skilled workers and the presence of higher-value roles.
- Local and regional colleges and training centers offer programs in biotechnology, business, diesel mechanics, and IT, fields that align with the needs of modern agriculture and AgTech.

- Eustis benefits from its proximity to Orlando, giving businesses access to a major tech and logistics hub while maintaining a more affordable cost structure.

### Strategic Considerations:

To position Eustis as a hub for AgTech and value-added agriculture, the city can build on existing assets and take targeted steps to support growth:

- Use NAICS data to identify cross-sector opportunities that span agriculture, manufacturing, and technology, helping to capture the full scope of AgTech activity. **Partners such as FloridaCommerce, Lake County, and LEAD have access to JobsEQ and can help the city delve deeper into the data provided in this report and beyond, offering valuable insights without requiring additional cost to the city.**
- Leverage partnerships with colleges and the existing incubator to develop workforce training and entrepreneurial support tailored to agricultural innovation.
- Promote Eustis as a rural innovation zone, emphasizing its geographic stability, affordability, and access to regional tech and logistics networks.
- Tap into USDA, SBA, and state programs to attract funding, technical assistance, and pilot projects that align with local strengths.
- Review land use policies and explore incentives that support controlled environment agriculture and small-scale manufacturing, ensuring infrastructure is aligned with industry needs.

### Industry Events for Recruitment:

- **World Agri-Tech Innovation Summit** (March 17–18, 2026, San Francisco, CA): A leading global event focused on sustainable agriculture, climate-smart solutions, and AgTech innovation. Brings together agribusiness leaders, tech firms, investors, and startups for strategic networking and partnership development.
- **Indoor Ag-Con** (February 11–12, 2026, Las Vegas, NV): The premier conference for vertical farming and controlled environment agriculture. Features dedicated tracks on crop types, smart systems, automation, and AI integration, with practical insights for growers and innovators.
- **FIRA USA** (October 21–23, 2025, Woodland, CA): Focused on autonomous farming and agricultural robotics, this event showcases in-field demos, startup pitches, and investor matchmaking. Ideal for exploring automation and smart equipment trends in specialty crops.
- **World Ag Expo** (February 10–12, 2026, Tulare, CA): The largest annual agricultural show in the U.S., featuring over 1,200 exhibitors and 100,000 attendees. Covers equipment, technology, and innovation across the full spectrum of agriculture.
- **Sunbelt Ag Expo** (October 14–16, 2025, Moultrie, GA): A major Southeastern event showcasing agribusiness innovation, youth engagement, and educational programming. Includes live demonstrations and networking opportunities for farmers and suppliers.

AgTech is still taking shape, with communities, entrepreneurs, and industry leaders all playing a role in defining what it means. It's a sector that blends tradition with innovation, and its boundaries continue to evolve. Eustis may not have all the answers yet, but it has the right ingredients—entrepreneurial energy, regional talent, and a willingness to explore new ideas. With thoughtful planning and collaboration, Eustis has the potential to become a place where the future of agriculture is not just imagined, but built.

## CONCLUSION: A TARGETED PATH FORWARD.

Eustis is making a deliberate choice to shape its economic future with intention. This analysis highlights five industry sectors that align with the city's strengths and aspirations, Food Processing/Manufacturing, Information Technology, Distribution, Aerospace Manufacturing, and AgTech. These sectors were selected not only for their growth potential but also for their compatibility with local infrastructure, workforce capacity, and community values.

A targeted approach allows Eustis to focus its efforts on where the city will have the greatest impact. It provides clarity for decision-makers, helps align public and private resources, and supports a more compelling message to potential investors and partners. By concentrating on industries that fit the city's profile, Eustis can build momentum and create meaningful opportunities for residents and businesses alike.

While these five sectors are the primary focus, other industries such as the creative economy and professional services were also considered. These areas contribute to the city's identity and offer potential for future development. As conditions evolve and new opportunities emerge, Eustis should remain open to ideas that complement its goals and enhance its economic diversity.

This report is meant to serve as a guide, not a prescription. By combining focus with adaptability, Eustis can build a strategy that reflects both current realities and future possibilities, creating space for growth, innovation, and long-term success.





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