

hardwood floors

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2026

INDUSTRY OUTLOOK

EXTENDED CONTENT

nwfa



2026

INDUSTRY OUTLOOK

INDUSTRY CONFIDENCE BUILDS: More than half expect growth in 2026

By Shannon Gayton

Nearly six in 10 wood flooring businesses expect stronger sales in 2026, according to the annual National Wood Flooring Association (NWFA) Industry Outlook survey. At the same time, rising interest rates, slowing remodeling activity, uncertainty around tariffs, and questions around consumer confidence are tempering expectations.



The latest Leading Indicator of Remodeling Activity (LIRA) from the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, released in July 2025, forecasted slower remodeling growth for 2026. LIRA provides a short-term outlook of national home improvement and repair spending on owner-occupied homes. This suggests that demand for wood flooring in remodeling projects may not grow as rapidly as in previous years.

On the new-build front, high interest rates and inflation continue to concern homebuilders, according to the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) and Wells Fargo Housing Market Index survey.

TARIFFS AND TRADE POLICY UNCERTAINTY

Weighing more heavily for some NWFAs members? Ongoing changes to U.S. trade policy and tariffs. About 42 percent in the survey said they were very or extremely concerned. An additional 40 percent said they were slightly or moderately concerned. For most, it was less about the specific numbers and more about the unknowns. “The uncertainty created by the constant changes regarding tariffs is affecting consumer confidence and lowering the overall economic activity, therefore lowering our potential sales,” one said.

Another said: “I understand the reasoning behind it, but it is very difficult to plan business moves when the tariffs keep changing. Even the U.S. customs people do not have the answers. The negotiations should have been happening without the increases, so it gave businesses time to plan and adjust accordingly.”

At the time of the survey – mid-summer – about 45 percent of NWFAs members said concerns about tariffs and trade policy had caused them to increase prices to offset tariff-related costs. “Our first thought was to absorb as much of the tariff increases as possible,” a respondent said. “In some circumstances, we have had to increase to cover prices (lower-margin products). We also took advantage of stock ordering before tariffs went into effect.”

Another 37 percent have switched to domestic suppliers to mitigate concerns. “We have seen sales increase. We are 100 percent domestic running, and we have had people come to us asking to provide pre-finished options that they normally would source from Canada.”

Other actions included:

- Increasing inventory levels to mitigate risk
- Shifting sourcing to different countries
- Absorbing cost increases without raising prices
- Delaying or canceling projects/purchases

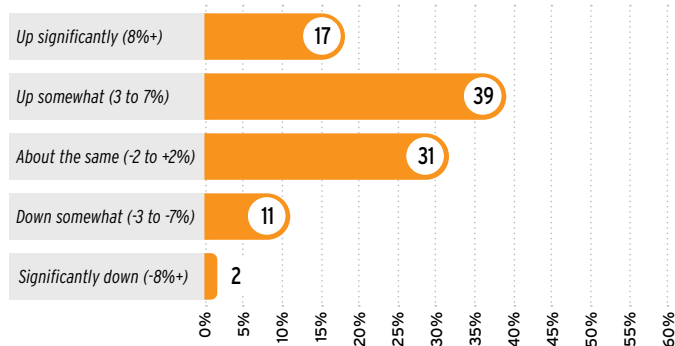
At the time of the survey, 32 percent of respondents said they have not made any changes to their sourcing strategies. Wood flooring historically has been considered a luxury item and somewhat insulated from economic fluctuations, said Jered Slusser, director of sales at Pioneer Millworks. “The people we are selling to are purchasing as high-end, high-quality products and services. I don’t see that altered by world trade, especially since we are producing a 100 percent American-made product.

“I think everyone would like to have everything made in the U.S. That is the goal of the current administration: to bring manufacturing stateside. But it’s just not possible. Some materials grow in other places of the world. There’s no scientific way to do it. Some trees don’t grow here, and we can’t find a substitute without it being cost-prohibitive.”

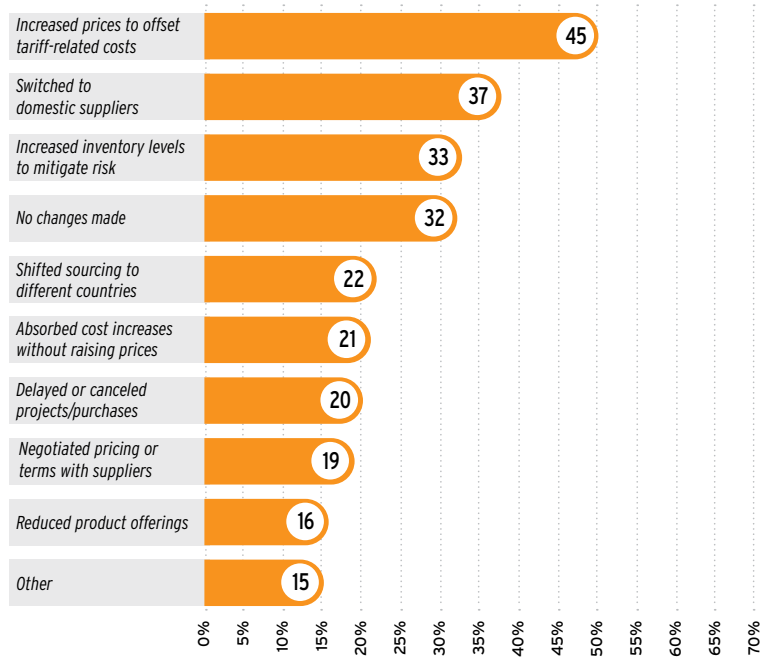
SUPPLY CHAIN IMPROVEMENTS

In recent years, some members have attributed supply chain disruptions to the closure of small- and mid-size mills, as well as high shipping and logging costs, remnants of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, most NWFAs members (70 percent) report no supply disruptions for any product in 2025.

2026 EXPECTED SALES GROWTH



IN WHAT WAYS HAVE TARIFFS INFLUENCED YOUR SOURCING OR SUPPLY CHAIN STRATEGY?



INDUSTRY OUTLOOK

What are your top concerns for 2026?

1. Tariffs/trade policy
2. Consumer demand
3. Interest rates

“During the pandemic, the price of white oak went absolutely nuts,” said Slusser. “It was off the charts. This was due to mills shutting down for extended periods of time. The same for many materials other than white, but that has settled down. The supply chain has remained pretty consistent.”

Some members still are experiencing extended lead times or unpredictable supply of hardwood, imported wood, and engineered wood flooring. For some, ever-changing freight costs continue to influence sourcing and supply strategies.

Kevin Daniels, owner at Heartland Floors, said: “Freight is still high, and that always is a big cost in what we do because wood floors are heavy and expensive to move. Many suppliers we purchase from buy in large quantities and containers. They’ll have a fixed price on certain items for months, but when the next container comes in, you don’t know what it is going to be priced at. It’s one thing if there’s a marginal 1 or 2 percent increase, but the unknown is what makes it challenging.”

CONTINUED DEMAND FOR CLEANER, MORE NATURAL TONES

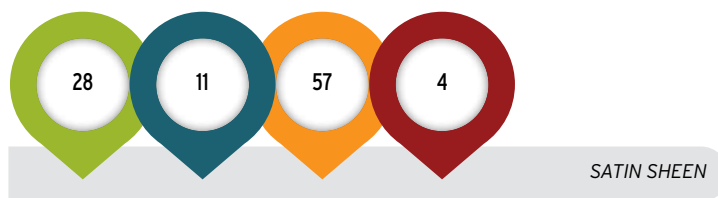
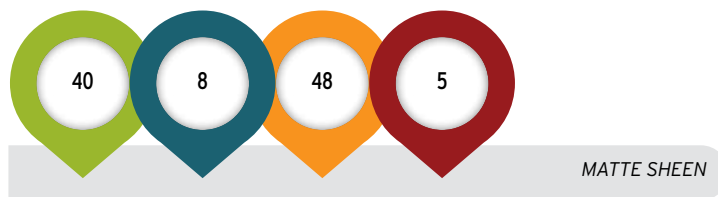
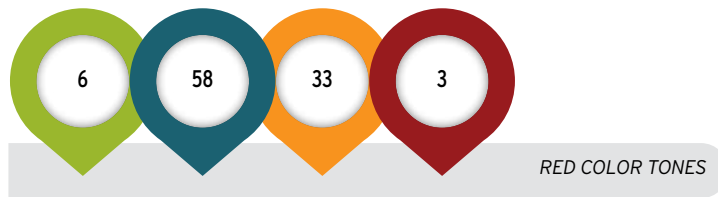
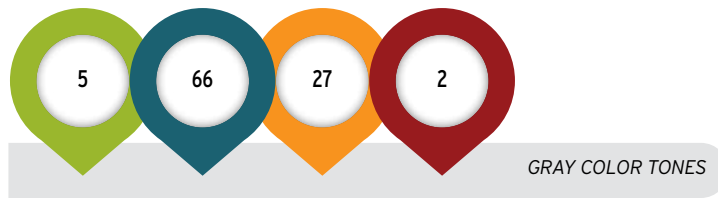
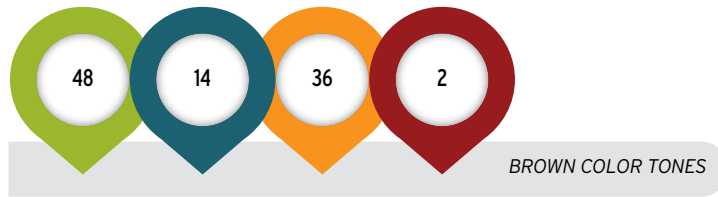
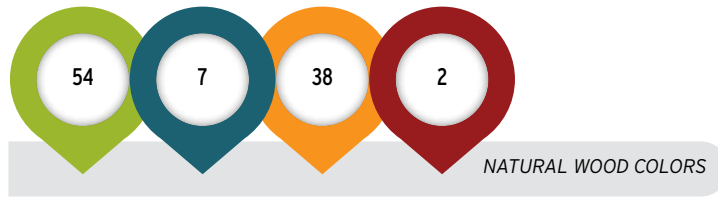
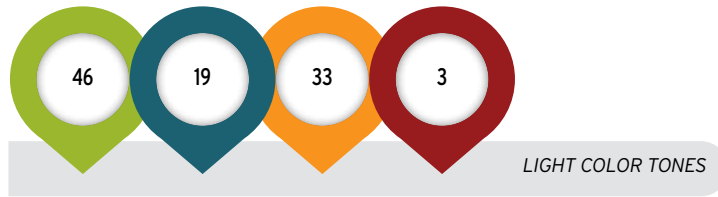
On the demand front, engineered wood flooring is continuing to gain popularity, according to many NWFA members.

Consumers also are demanding:

- Longer, wider boards
- Engineered factory-finished wood flooring
- Natural tones
- Light color tones

White oak continues to be a dominant domestic selection for 63 percent of members. Demand for gray and red color tones continues to decline as demand for natural tones grows. Nearly half of NWFA members say flooring in brown color tones is increasing in demand.

EXPECTED DEMAND BY COLOR IN 2026



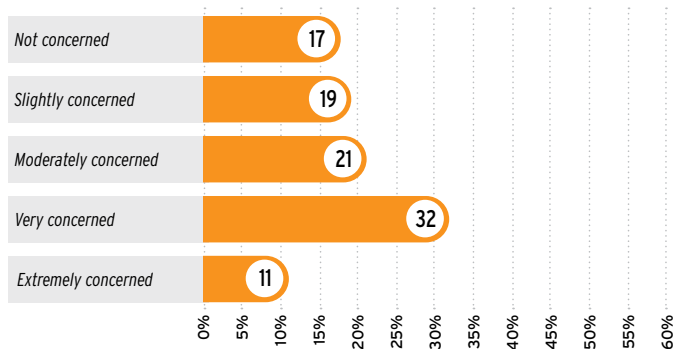
● More Demand
 ● Less Demand
 ● Same Demand
 ● Don't Know/Didn't Sell

“Matte is very popular as natural light is in high demand in homes. They don’t want the glare or sheen. High demand for engineered flooring is based on new structures with radiant heat sources,” said one survey respondent.

Responding to changes in trends requires regular communication with consumers. “Mid-century modern is a huge design trend we’re seeing right now that favors narrow and clean lines,” said George Celtrick, owner at Whitewood Products.

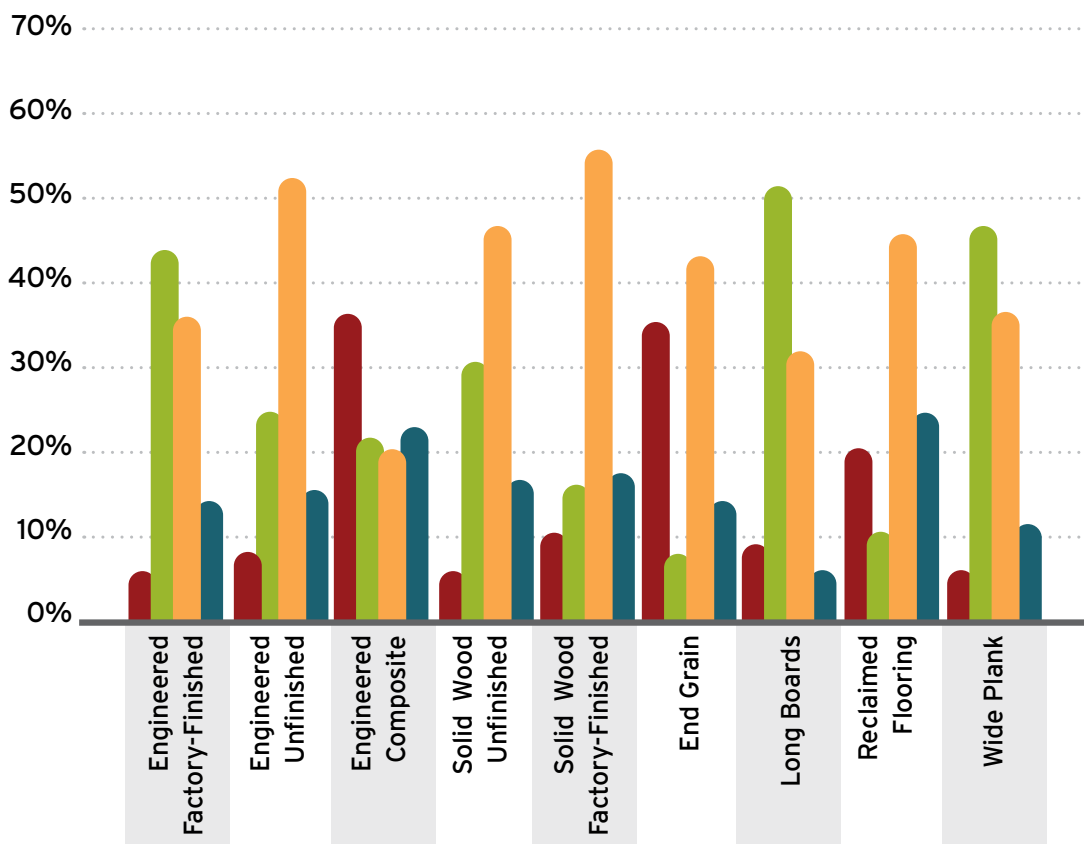
Alex Hamilton, co-founder and field operations manager at Grain Design Flooring, said they have been selling more pre-finished wood flooring in recent years. “Three years ago, we had one or two pre-finish projects for the year, and this year, I personally installed almost 20,000 square feet of pre-finish.”

HOW CONCERNED ARE YOU ABOUT FUTURE CHANGES TO U.S. TRADE POLICY OR TARIFFS IMPACTING YOUR BUSINESS?

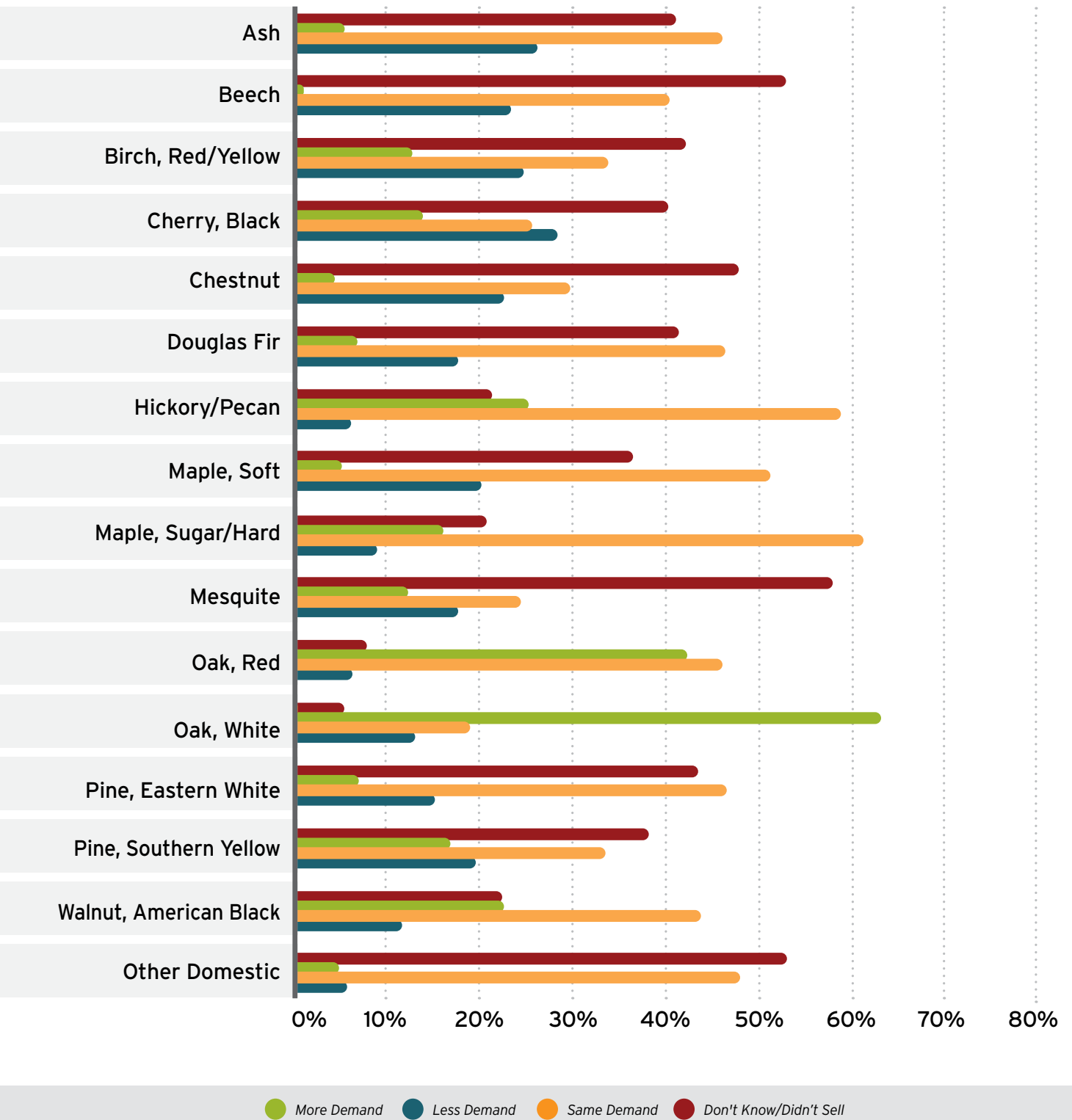


● More Demand
 ● Less Demand
 ● Same Demand
 ● Don't Know/Didn't Sell

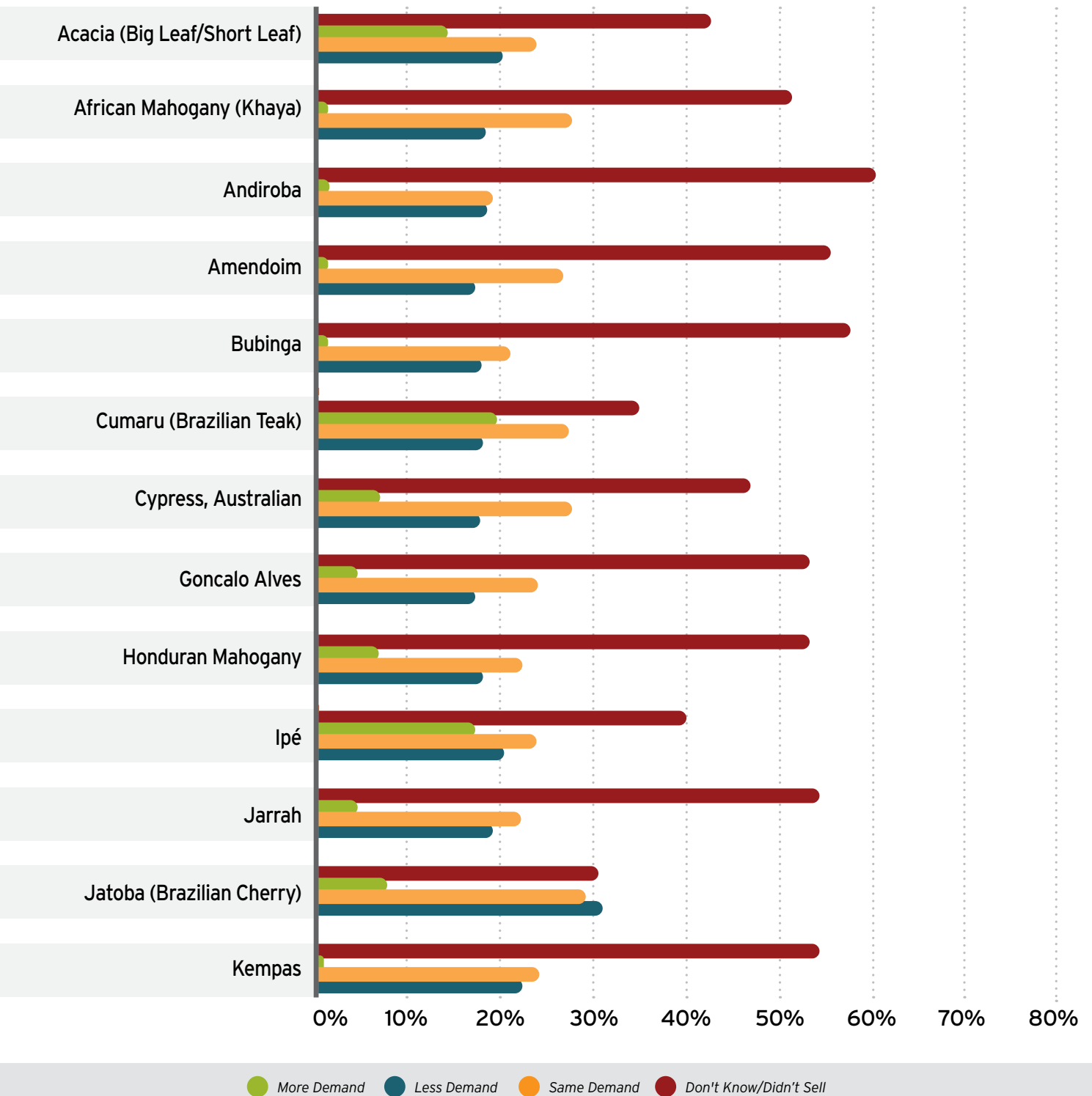
EXPECTED DEMAND BY TYPE IN 2026



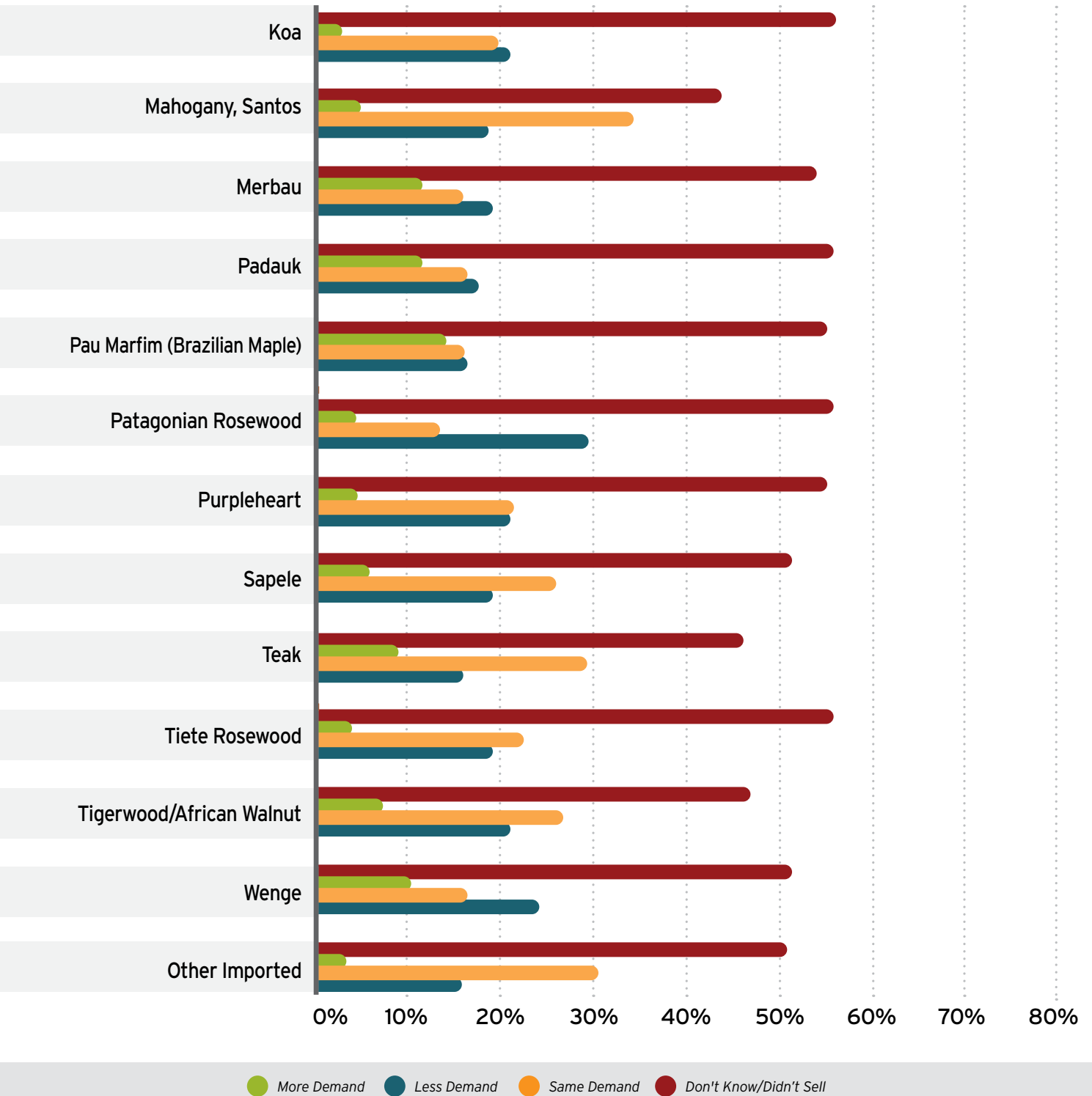
EXPECTED DEMAND BY DOMESTIC SPECIES IN 2026



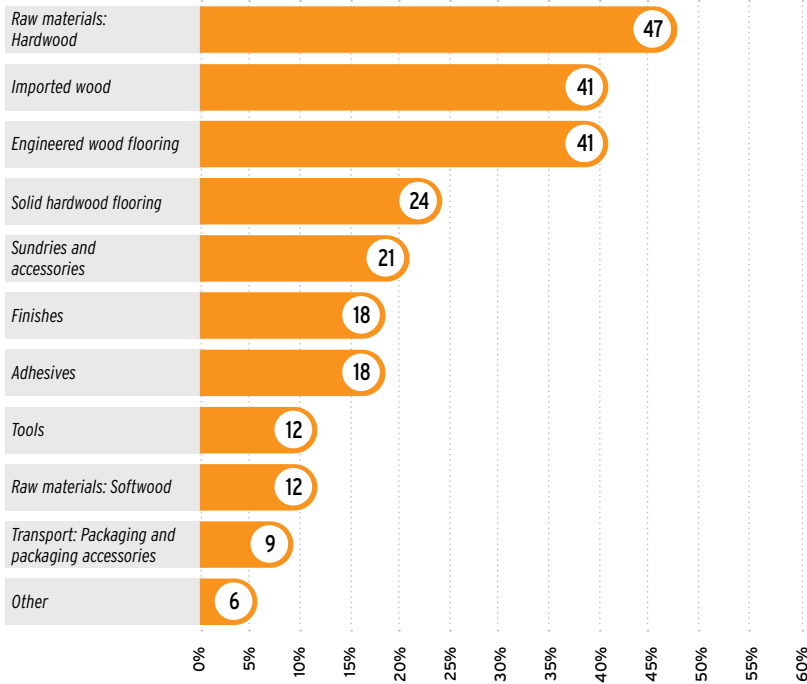
EXPECTED DEMAND BY IMPORTED SPECIES IN 2026



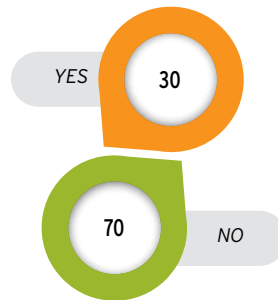
EXPECTED DEMAND BY IMPORTED SPECIES IN 2026



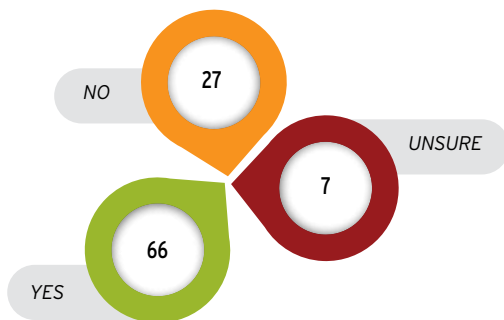
WHICH PRODUCT AREAS ARE YOU EXPERIENCING EXTENDED LEAD TIMES OR UNPREDICTABLE SUPPLY?



ARE YOU EXPERIENCING SUPPLY CHAIN DISRUPTION FOR ANY PRODUCT?



HAS COMPETITION FROM WOOD-LOOK PRODUCTS (SUCH AS LVT, WPC, LAMINATE) HAD A NEGATIVE EFFECT ON YOUR REAL-WOOD PRODUCT SALES?

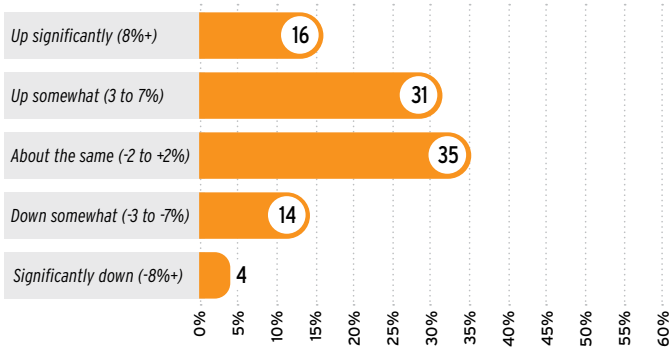


INDUSTRY OUTLOOK

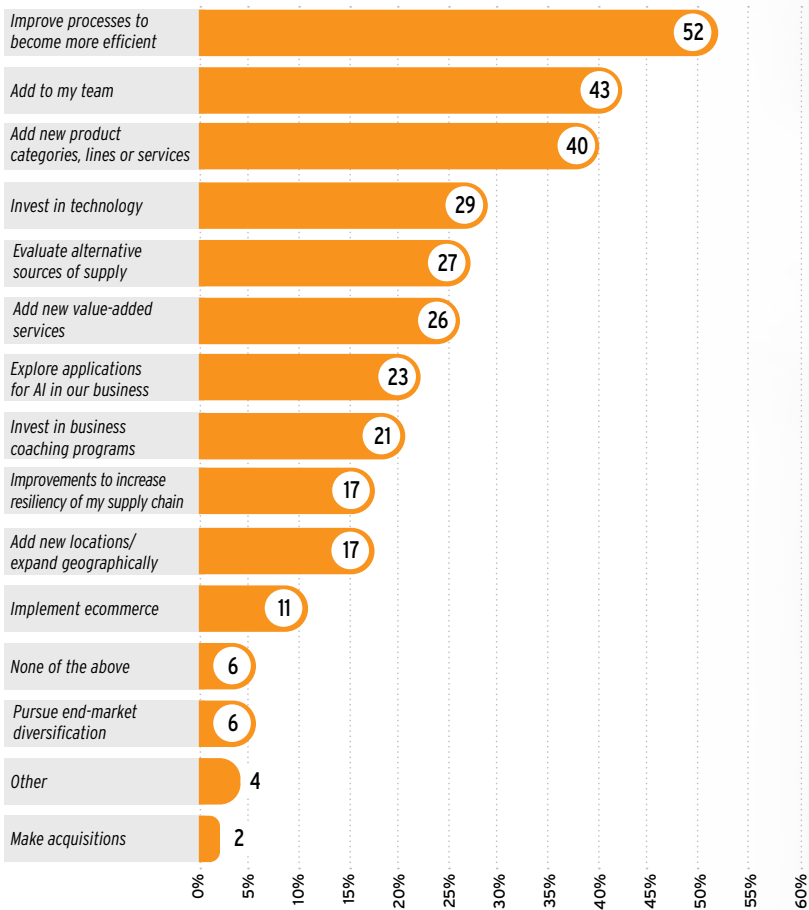
What issues are you seeing with claims?

1. Customer expectations
2. Moisture-related claims
3. Installation-related claims

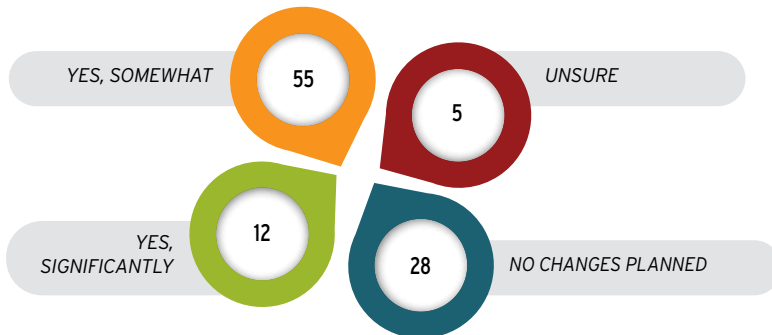
2025 EXPECTED SALES GROWTH



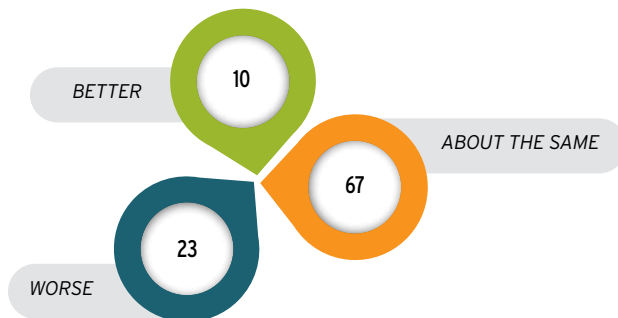
BASED ON THE CURRENT ENVIRONMENT, WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING INITIATIVES WILL YOU IMPLEMENT IN 2026?



ARE YOU ADJUSTING YOUR BUSINESS STRATEGY DUE TO ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY?



ARE CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH FINDING NEW EMPLOYEES BETTER, THE SAME, OR WORSE THAN LAST YEAR?



WOOD LOOK PRODUCTS

Competition from wood-look products (such as LVT, WPC, and laminate) continues to hurt real-wood sales, according to two-thirds of respondents. Some say it is because homeowners are opting for non-wood alternatives that often are cheaper and are swayed by marketing. One member has a more optimistic outlook and said, “I think it is leveling out a bit. I am seeing people with LVP that is already trashed and switching back to real wood.”

Other responses include:

- “I directly represent a wood-based flooring with LVT as my day-to-day competition. There are increasing opportunities based on their structural failure and petrochemical composition.”
- “Lots of consumers start with LVT/WPC/laminate in mind, and we have to upsell to real wood products. We still get those sales and don’t

“I want to teach everybody how good hardwood is, including our clients, our community, and everyone we come in contact with.”

– Alex Hamilton,
Grain Design Flooring

think we would otherwise if wood-look products didn’t exist.”

- “I’m seeing a renewed interest in wood flooring as people tire of the vinyl planks. Vinyl will remain huge, but consumer trends back to wood have been a small boost.”

IS EDUCATION KEY TO CLOSING THE TALENT GAP?

Two-thirds of respondents in the survey reported persistent challenges in finding new employees, and another 23 percent say it has worsened since last year.

According to one NWFA member, “The job-hopper mentality of the younger workforce, from one company to another for a minimal increase, makes building a staff of employees increasingly costly, only to have them leave for a better offer after they are trained.”

Hamilton’s business model has both a retail side and installations; he said education will overcome the talent shortage. He’s rolling out an apprenticeship program to recruit young talent into the industry. “My biggest goal for 2026 is education certifications. I currently have eight apprentices I’m trying to send through the NWFA certification program. That will be scheduled for early 2026, and we will set up testing and then go from there. This is not just for the craftsman side, but also the sales team side, and our entire company. I want to teach everybody how good hardwood is, including our clients, our community, and everyone we come in contact with.”

CONTRACTORS

NWFA contractors reported overall favorable wood-flooring sales growth in 2024, with 60 percent reporting that wood-flooring installations sales were up. Of those who reported gains during that time, reasons included order cost increases and larger projects to builder clients.

NWFA contractors had mixed expectations for the full-year 2025. Thirty-six percent of contractors expect moderate growth in full-year 2025 sales, with a quarter expecting sales to stay the same or decrease, respectively. One contractor said, “I’ve personally had five large jobs put on hold because of the tariff threats.”

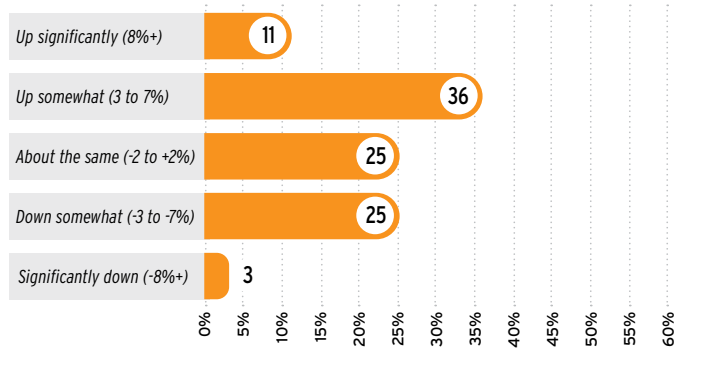
Those delays and cancellations illustrate the broader concern: future changes to trade policy and tariffs remain difficult to plan around. Another contractor said, “The middle-class American consumer is going to be decimated by increasing taxes, tariffs, student loan repayments, and rising healthcare costs. The residential market won’t warm up until interest rates fall, but foreign nations aren’t buying our debt.”

Mike Somodean, owner and founder at MSCS Inc., said his company tries to mitigate these issues internally. “The client isn’t concerned about these issues; it shouldn’t be their concern. We stand by our estimates and what we deliver. It requires long-term preparation. We don’t visit the distributor daily to purchase what we need. We hold stock of these items and follow a set process for our equipment, materials, finishes, and the steps we use. We have to forecast the jobs on the schedule to make sure we have what we need on hand.”

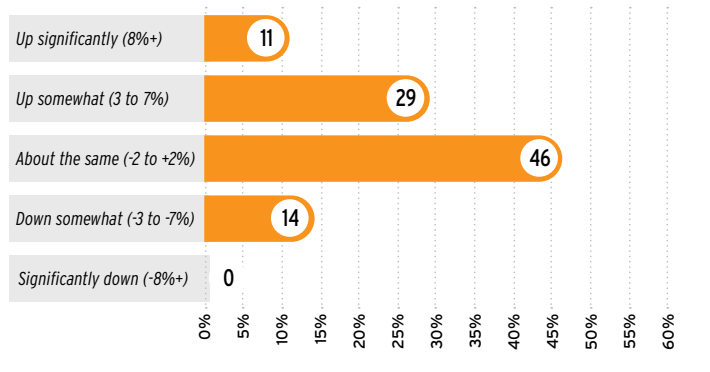
Despite concerns, contractors in the survey are cautiously optimistic for 2026. More than 39 percent anticipate growth in wood flooring sales in 2026, while 46 percent expect sales to stay the same. Contractors reported that price was among the biggest obstacles in selling wood flooring today. Other responses included:

- Customer expectations, mainly about price
- Shortage of candidates for install/sand and finish
- Concerns about maintenance, cost, and time
- LVP

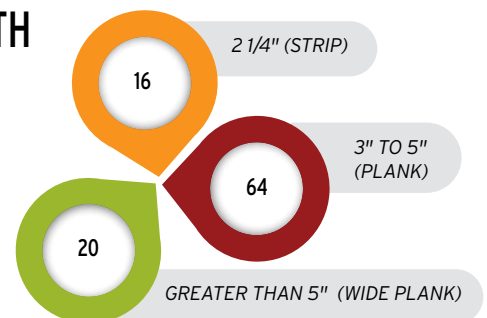
2025 EXPECTED SALES GROWTH



2026 SALES OUTLOOK



WHAT IS THE AVERAGE WIDTH OF FLOORING YOU ARE INSTALLING?

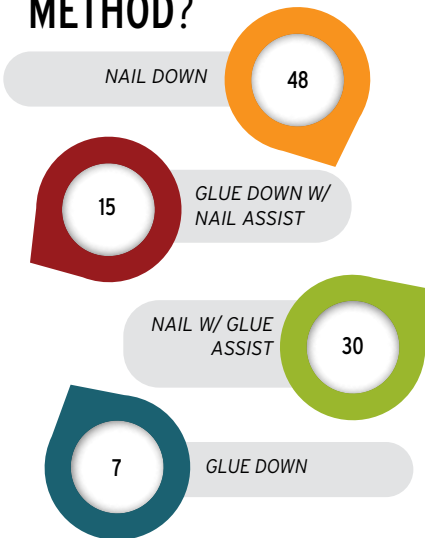


CONTRACTORS

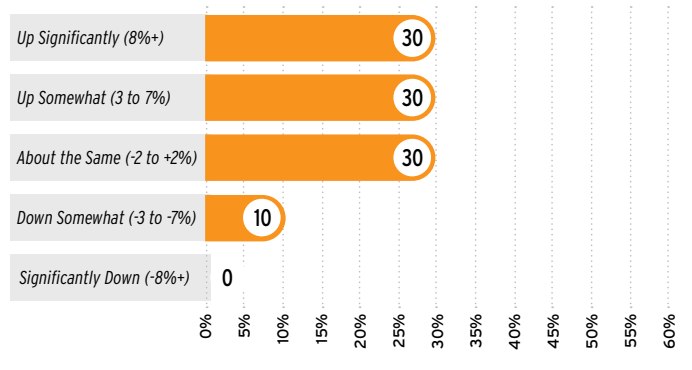
Matthew Lewis, director of operations at Lewis Hardwood, said educating consumers on the benefits of wood flooring is a top priority. “We’ve become an instant gratification culture; people want things cheap and shiny. They aren’t necessarily thinking about the long-term quality of a product. Some people want LVP because they hear it is water-resistant and scratch-resistant. Ten years from now, the floor will be worn out and thrown in a landfill. I am considering ways to present hardwood as a worthwhile investment.”

Somodean said that to uphold his company’s quality standards in a tight labor market, he puts the time in at the front end to hire the right people. “We hire slow and fire fast. There are people out there who are looking for steady work, to do good work, and feel valued. They care about the work they leave behind. They want a career path and to know their employer will invest in them and teach them.”

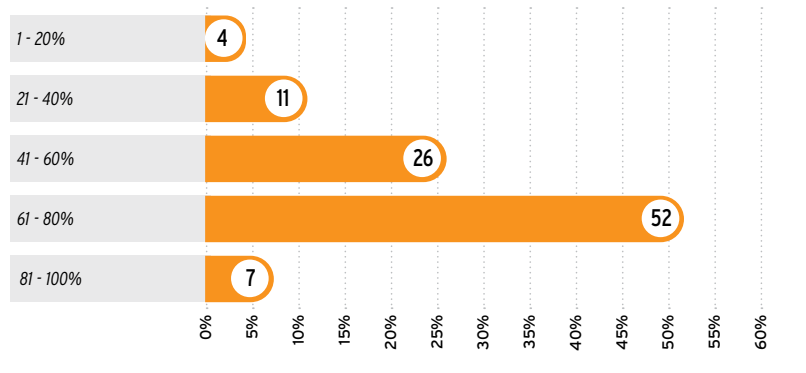
WHAT IS THE MOST COMMON INSTALLATION METHOD?



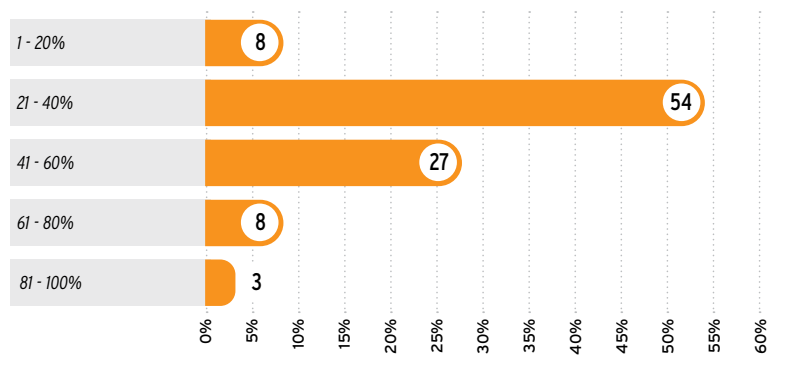
2024 FULL YEAR EXPECTED SALES



WHAT PERCENTAGE OF YOUR OVERALL BUSINESS IS SAND & FINISH (VS INSTALLATIONS)?



WHAT PERCENTAGE OF YOUR INSTALLATION BUSINESS IS FACTORY FINISHED?





ADOBESTOCK ©

ECONOMY AS THE TOP COMPLAINT

Delays and cancellations illustrate the broader concern: future changes to trade policy and tariffs remain difficult to plan around. Another contractor said, “The middle-class American consumer is going to be decimated by increasing taxes, tariffs, student loan repayments, and rising healthcare costs.”

Contractors shared their plans for becoming more competitive moving into the remainder of 2025 and into 2026. Responses included:

- Emphasize wood value and sustainability
- Giving the best products and education to clients and potential clients
- Develop better marketing
- Move toward more restoration
- Create a better web presence
- Invest in new equipment
- Run more ads

“We’ve always relied on local, word-of-mouth networking, so we never had to market ourselves,” Lewis said. “However, people aren’t talking as much to their neighbors and friends about the services they use. They’re relying on search engines to find local businesses.”

Another contractor said they will focus on solidifying client trust in 2026. “We have seen an uptick of really bad jobs and contractors lately, much more than usual. We want to be able to show clients we have the track record they can trust. Instead of just shopping for price and potentially having to do it twice.”

DISTRIBUTORS

Half of distributors expect sales to stay about the same in 2025, with a quarter of those surveyed saying sales will be up. Those with lower expectations attribute them to diminishing consumer confidence in the economy. Looking ahead, 55 percent expect to see an increase in wood flooring sales in 2026.

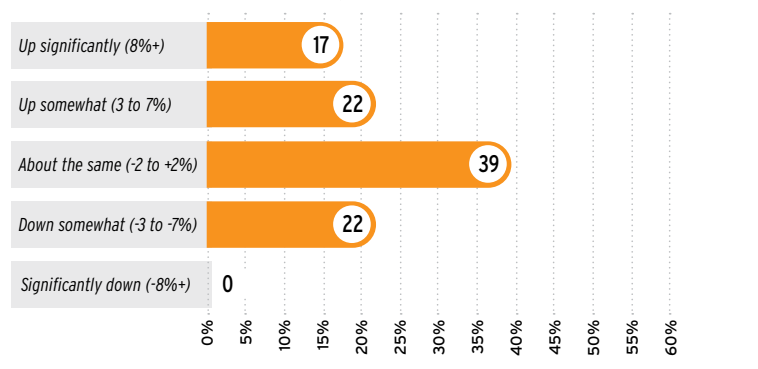
One distributor said, “I believe the interest rate will come down and people will start borrowing to do home improvement projects.” Another said they were uncertain as to what the housing market will look like in 2026. “Truth is: I can’t say due to the current situation with tariffs and policy.”

Craig Dupra, co-founder and owner at Installers Warehouse, said economic uncertainty has many businesses holding steady, looking for signs of what’s next. “It’s like you’re in the middle of the stream, not sure whether to go forward or back. But you are getting used to the temperature of the water and are okay staying where you are for the moment.”

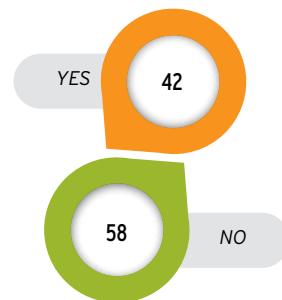
Kevin Daniels, owner of Heartland Floors, said buyers are more cost-conscious and hesitant because of market uncertainty. “There is so much inconsistency right now, and the unknown has put fear and doubt into the public. There are a lot of nervous people, making it hard to predict what is ahead. To combat that, we’ve become more diligent about checking inventory, cost, and pricing before quoting jobs. We are focused on communicating with our customers often and providing them with detailed information.”



SALES OF WOOD FLOORING PRODUCTS IN 2024 COMPARED TO 2023



DO YOU SELL ONLINE THROUGH AN ECOMMERCE WEBSITE?



Dupra shared a similar sentiment: “During COVID, there was a surge in demand for flooring. One of our vendors said that seven years of demand were satisfied during the pandemic. Right now, there’s a double whammy. We have economic uncertainty, and we have oversatisfied demand. Customers are not as motivated to pull the trigger as they were.”

2026 ECONOMIC CONCERNS

Buyers are more cost-conscious and hesitant because of market uncertainty. “There is much inconsistency right now, and the unknown has put fear and doubt into the public. There are a lot of nervous people, making it hard to predict what’s ahead.”

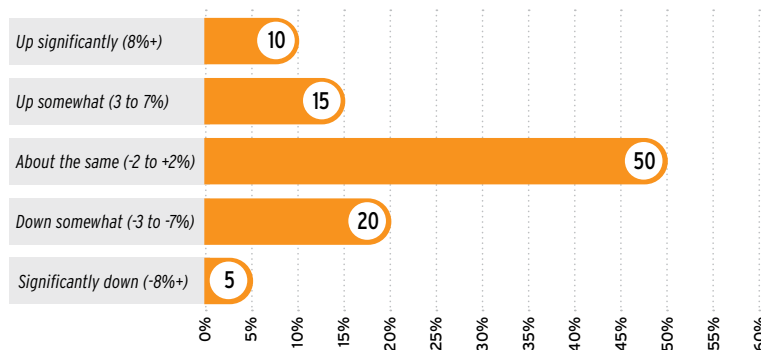
Some distributors say wood floors traditionally have been considered a luxury item and somewhat insulated from market changes. However, Daniels said, “Our demographic primarily has been people who are well-established or retirees. We’ve found they can weather the little ups and downs in the economy. But I’ve noticed a shift in the air over the last three months.”

Distributors’ plans to remain competitive in 2026 include increasing inventory, testing new products and alternate sources, investing more in training, and expanding geographically. Dupra said distributors can benefit from evaluating the channel.

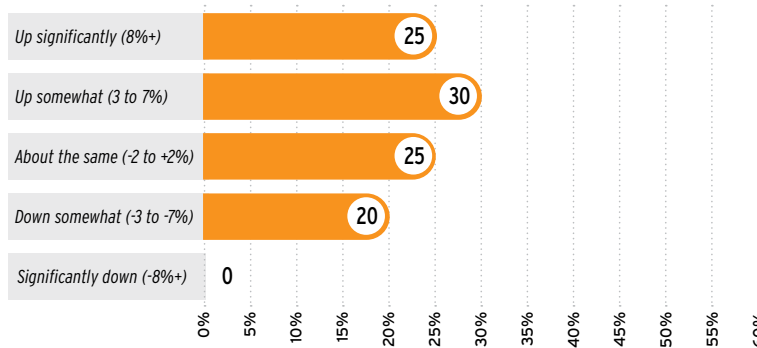
“If distributors are still following the traditional business model, how do they remain competitive? First, they have to decide who they are competing against. Are they competing with a manufacturer who is going direct or competing with another distributor? As margins get thinner and markets get tighter, being asset-heavy becomes an enormous burden. One of the problems with traditional distribution is that it is an asset-heavy business, with physical location, people, inventory, infrastructure, trucks, delivery, and the whole nine yards. I have another company, Revel Woods, and its model has solved every one of these problems.”

Dupra added, “Good companies try to do better than they did last year. Great companies find a gap in the market and get there before anyone else.”

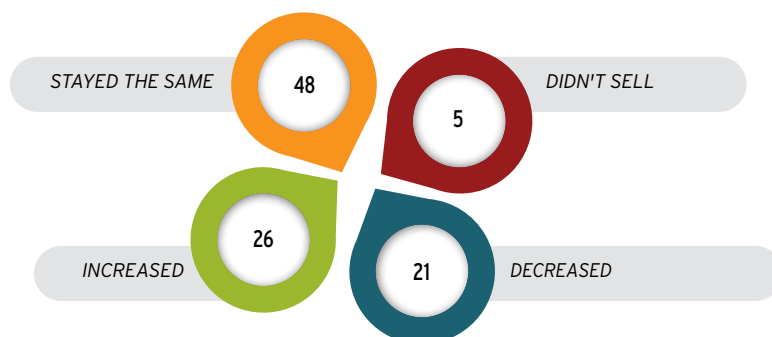
HALFWAY THROUGH 2025, WHAT IS YOUR EXPECTATION FOR FULL-YEAR REVENUES COMPARED WITH 2024 LEVELS?



2026 SALES OUTLOOK



WHERE DOES THE SHARE OF YOUR BUSINESS THAT INCLUDES LVT/WPC/LAMINATE STAND?



NWFA manufacturers' expectations for 2025 full-year sales were favorable, with 41 percent anticipating moderate growth (3-7 percent), and another 22 percent expecting to close out the year with significant gains (8+ percent). Some attributed gains to increased sales and marketing initiatives, along with deeper market penetration.

Looking ahead, 55 percent of manufacturers expect to see moderate sales growth in 2026, with another 21 percent expecting significant gains. While many manufacturers are optimistic, some say it largely will depend on tariffs and their impact on consumer confidence.

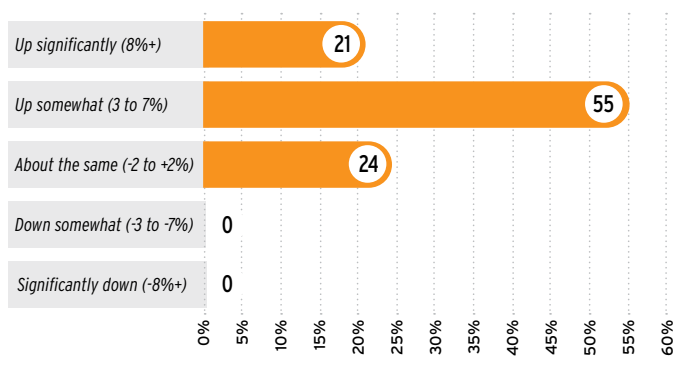
So far in 2025, 47 percent of manufacturers reported that pricing for their products has stayed about the same. One manufacturer stated that despite increased freight costs, they will not raise prices for the remainder of 2025. "Since we are in a unique position with 10 million square feet in stock, we are locking in pricing on new launches for the rest of the year. Other vendors are sending out price-increase letters, saying they are not sure when or how much, but their prices will go up. We're saying come launch a new line with us, and the pricing will not go up in 2025. We are bringing stability to our customers."

Manufacturers are split on 2026 pricing. Nearly 49 percent of NWFA manufacturers anticipate pricing will remain the same in 2026. Another 49 percent anticipate moderate increases. "We are securing material well in advance in hopes of not having to raise prices like other competitors," said one manufacturer in the survey.

More than half of manufacturers in the survey have adopted automation and technology to improve the manufacturing of their products. Examples provided include:

- End matching machines
- Textured machines

2026 SALES OUTLOOK



- Automated wood plank sorters
- Robotic grading systems
- Packaging equipment
- Design software
- Void filling
- Defecting

Improving processes and investing in automation and other technologies are just two of the ways manufacturers plan to become more competitive in 2026.

"We're exploring e-commerce and ways to keep in touch with customers more easily," said Jered Slusser, director of sales at Pioneer Millworks. "People are used to the way Amazon works. They want to be able to see their orders, delivery dates, and track them, even at 11 p.m."

IMPROVEMENTS ON PROCESSES/AUTOMATION

"We're exploring e-commerce and ways to keep in touch with customers more easily," said Jered Slusser, director of sales at Pioneer Millworks. "People are used to the way Amazon works. They want to be able to see their orders, delivery dates, and track them, even at 11 p.m."

Other plans to remain competitive include:

- Find dealers in markets and regions not established yet
- Become more efficient by improving employee training and product understanding
- Onboard more direct architects and builders
- Increase inventory
- Negotiate supply

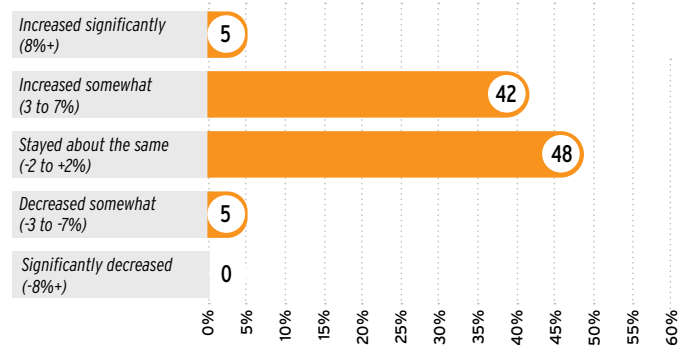
One member said their plans to become more competitive include “being the supplier dealers can count on not to drop the ball. Take on all the custom work, regardless of size. Be their technical go-to for training and other issues.”

George Celtrick, owner at Whitewood Products, said: “We’re a close cousin to a 2x4, as much as we don’t want to admit it. That’s what makes us a price-sensitive industry. The only technologies that have changed over the last 10 years are improvements in glue. What makes you different is the quality of lumber. Honor your delivery schedules and make a good, consistent product.”

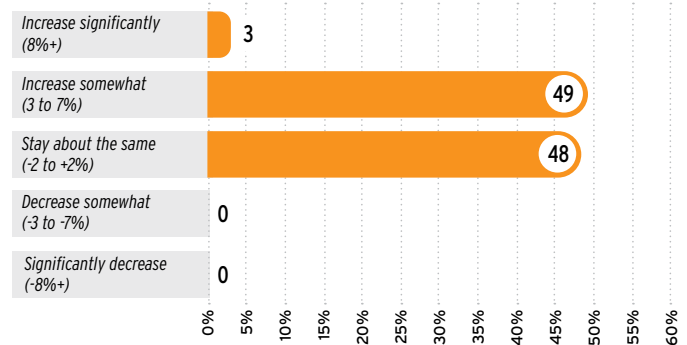
Slusser aims to empower customers with transparent information about their flooring, everything from where it’s sourced to how it’s made to its long-term health and environmental impacts. He said by fostering relationships and emphasizing education, especially around topics like sustainable harvesting, indoor air quality, and product origin, people can make informed choices. “It’s important for us to help our customers make educated decisions, especially when you are talking about a material you’re going to live with for the rest of your life.”

He added, “Many things we do are Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) Certified. That means the flooring has been scored on factors like air quality, composition, and materials. In some certifications, there are scores based on labor practices involved in the harvest and production of materials. This is an important aspect that often gets overlooked in residential projects.”

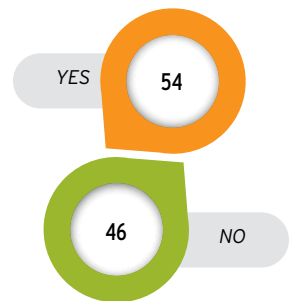
IN 2025, PRICING FOR THE PRODUCTS I SELL HAS:



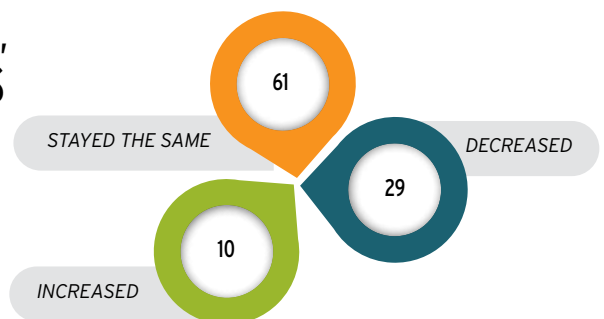
IN 2026, WHAT DO YOU EXPECT YOUR PRICING WILL DO?



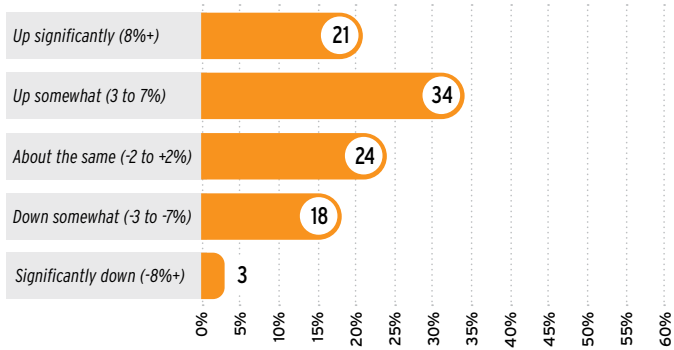
HAS YOUR COMPANY ADOPTED ANY NEWER TECHNOLOGY THAT BETTER AUTOMATES YOUR PROCESS?



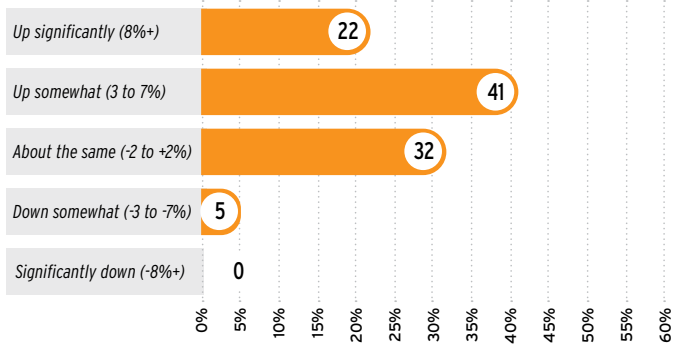
IN 2025, CLAIMS HAVE:



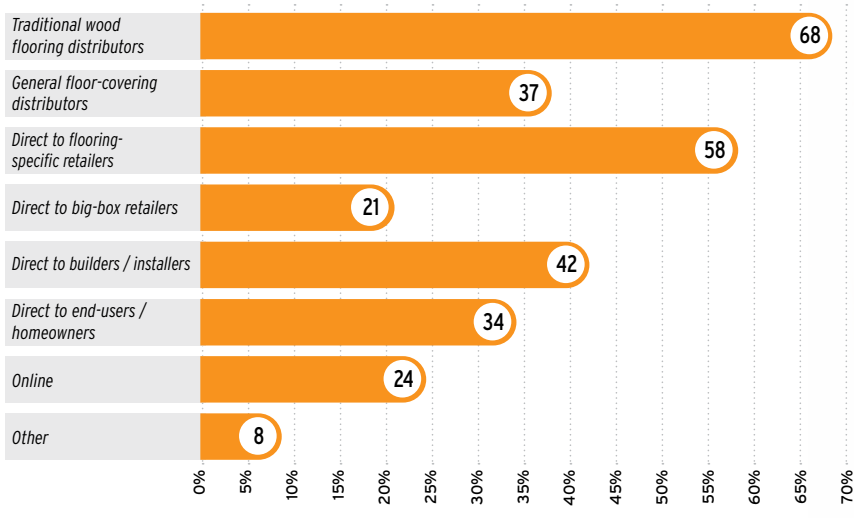
SALES OF WOOD FLOORING PRODUCTS IN 2024 COMPARED TO 2023



2025 FULL YEAR EXPECTED SALES



BY WHICH SALES CHANNELS DO YOU GO TO MARKET?



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RETAILERS

Halfway through 2025, just more than 41 percent of retailers expect sales to stay the same compared to 2024; about a quarter expect moderate growth.

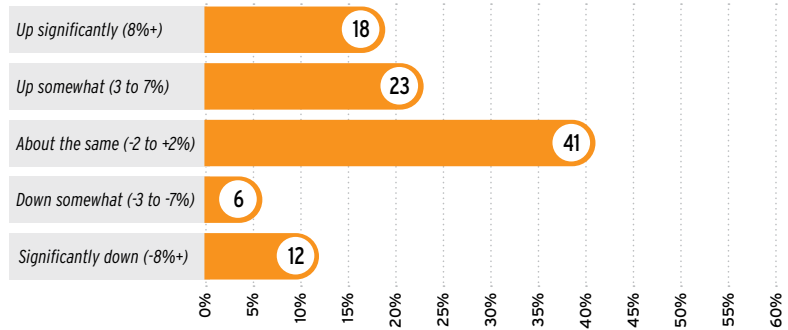
“We added an additional crew in January. This gives us the ability to get to more work,” said one retailer. Another also is seeing strength right now: “The phones are ringing off the hook – and all of it is big.” But some are experiencing a slower construction market amid concerns over interest rates and trade stability.

Looking ahead, 41 percent of retailers anticipate sales to increase in 2026, and 29 percent expect sales to decline. Forty-one percent of retailers reported that their companies’ wood flooring sales were growing more slowly than non-wood flooring products. One retailer attributed the slower growth to laminate flooring becoming more realistic-looking and priced lower than hardwood.

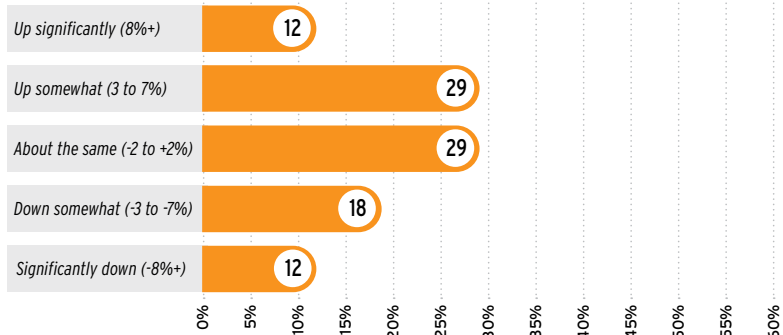
Alex Hamilton, co-founder and field operations manager at Grain Design Flooring, said there is talk in the industry about how LVP is attacking wood flooring sales. He doesn’t agree. “I beg to differ. Everyone loves wood so much that these other products are trying to imitate it. Everyone wants wood; they just don’t think they can afford it. But in some cases, they are paying just as much money for LVP as they could be paying for hardwood. It comes down to understanding your client and helping them figure out what is going to accommodate their space best.”

According to NWEA retailers, the top features customers shop for when looking for a new floor are durability (94 percent), price (76 percent), and attractiveness (59 percent). Retailers reported that factory-finished engineered

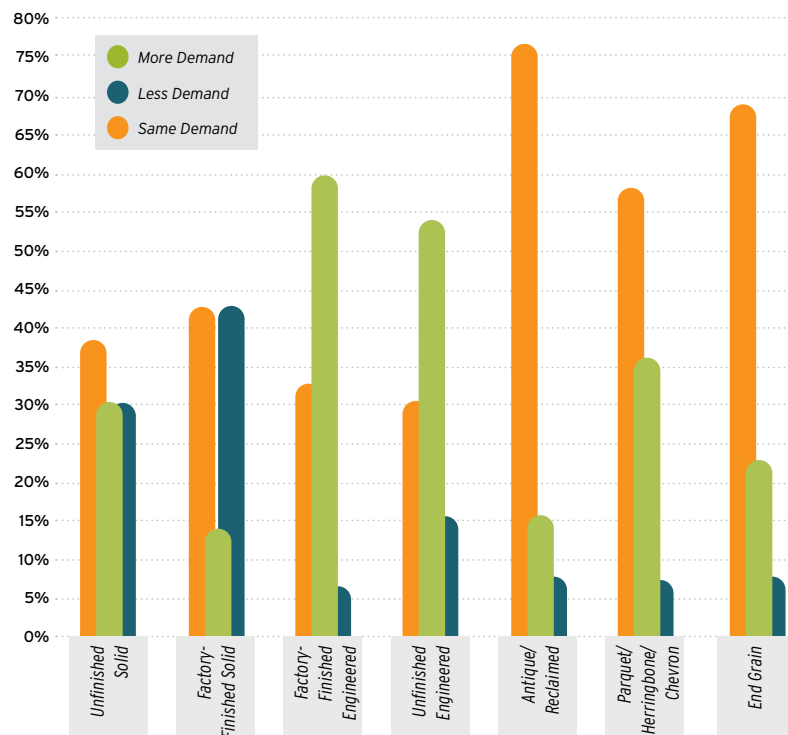
2025 EXPECTATIONS FOR FULL-YEAR REVENUES COMPARED WITH 2024 LEVELS



2026 SALES OUTLOOK



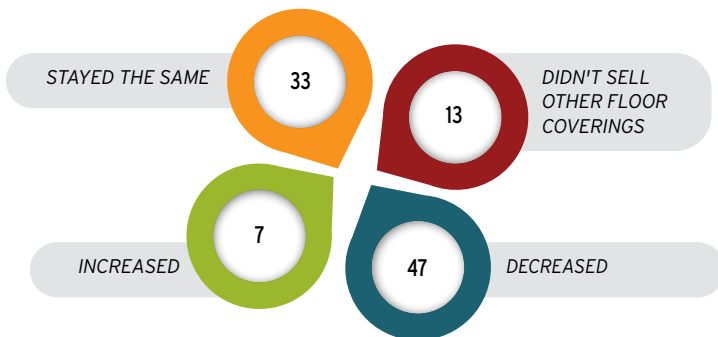
WHICH PRODUCTS HAVE SEEN A SHIFT IN DEMAND IN 2025?



WHAT DO CUSTOMERS WANT?

Alex Hamilton, co-founder at Grain Design Flooring, said there's talk in the industry about how LVP is attacking wood flooring sales. He doesn't agree. "There is a market for custom floors, but clients don't always know it's an option until it is presented as an option."

HOW HAVE CLAIMS WITH WOOD FLOORING COMPARED TO CLAIMS WITH WOOD-LOOK FLOOR COVERINGS (SUCH AS LVT, WPC) IN THE PAST YEAR?



wood flooring products have experienced the highest increase in demand for 2025, followed by unfinished engineered wood flooring products. Demand for antique/reclaimed products saw the sharpest decline, followed by end grain and parquet/herringbone/chevron.

Hamilton thinks the industry will experience a substantial increase in pre-finished, engineered, wide plank and said he wouldn't be surprised to see solid come back around in three to four years.

According to Angelo DeSanto, owner of Dande West, trends in flooring are shifting back to timeless, classic looks. Grays have faded in popularity, giving way to lighter, more natural tones. He said wider planks are becoming a staple.

For DeSanto, quality craftsmanship and customer-focused service are the foundation of his retail and installation business. He helps clients choose flooring that fits their aesthetic and needs. "I ask questions about their budget and their specific lifestyles. I give them choices."

Despite the increasing demand for lighter options, "Everyone loves the natural white oak floor with that raw wood look," Hamilton said. "But I think people are starting to catch on and realize how hard they are to keep clean. They are starting to look for a bit of color to minimize the appearance of dirt in the soft grain of the wood."

RETAILERS

What are the top features customers shop for when looking for flooring?

1. Durability
2. Price
3. Attractiveness

To become more competitive moving into 2026, retailers plan to:

- Increase touchpoints with clients and builders
- Offer competitive prices and better service
- Invest in education and training
- Do more in-house marketing and advertising
- Hire more staff
- Improve their showrooms

Hamilton said his company looks to add more custom floors to its portfolio. "There is a market for custom floors, but clients don't always know it's an option until it is presented as an option."

DeSanto said his company's success is rooted in the standards set by the NWEA. He integrates their training into his daily operations. "I live by the NWEA. It's a fail-safe. It's solid concrete you can stand on and reach for the stars."

ADJUSTING BUSINESS STRATEGIES TO ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY

At the time of the survey, just more than half of NWEA members said they are worried about tariffs and trade policies going into 2026. Followed by consumer demand (48 percent), interest rates (35 percent), and inflation (34 percent). Other top concerns included:

- Political climate
- Labor availability
- Non-wood floor covering competition

Almost 68 percent of NWEA members surveyed said they have adjusted their business strategies in response to their concerns. Some members are taking proactive steps to navigate the uncertainties of 2026. One member said they are ordering maximum supply for key products, while another is planning to purchase more cautiously to avoid overstocking and potential expiration of finishes left on the shelf.

“Bi-weekly financial meetings with my management team have provided a huge help in streamlining our process. We have noticed savings in labor and materials to increase our gross profit more than last year,” one member said.

More than half of respondents plan to improve processes to become more efficient in 2026. About 43 percent of respondents plan to add to their team in 2026, and 40 percent will add new product categories, lines, or services. Investing in technology was named by about a third of respondents.

Mike Somodean, owner and founder at MSCS Inc., said process improvement and innovation are ongoing in his company. “There is always room for better. We monitor opportunities continually to improve our processes and increase efficiency. That being said, we ensure we have a solid base before adopting new methods or processes. If a new method doesn’t work, we can get back on track fast. That’s the result of long-term planning.”

Education remains a top priority for NWEA contractors in 2026. “It’s front and center the fact that we are certified professionals. We put a lot of weight on training and staying up-to-date with our industry’s progress and development,” Somodean said.

Matthew Lewis, director of operations at Lewis Hardwood Flooring, shared a similar sentiment. “Continued success boils down to continual education and adding value. You never can stop learning and educating your customers on the pros and cons of the flooring options they choose.”

Craig Dupra, co-founder and owner of Installers Warehouse, said his company is embracing technology to provide a better customer experience. “One of the things I do as an NWEA inspector and former chair of the board of directors is provide technical advice. There’s only so much of me to go around. If you want to scale that expertise, you have to get out of the way. We have been using AI to enhance our pricing and provide deeper insights into technical product data, creating a place where customers can ask questions and receive efficient and accurate answers. It also has helped provide data insights we need.”

Somodean says he is all in with NWEA and offered advice for members:

“You get out what you put in. There is a common misconception that once you pay the membership fee, something will fall into your lap. It doesn’t work that way. I view NWEA membership as a tool. It is a learning tool, a marketing tool, and a networking tool. It can be used in so many different ways. But it must be used.”

Dupra also offered advice to other members looking to win in 2026. “Being better always is more valuable than being cheaper.”

Shannon Gayton is part of the team at 3 Aspens Media. In partnership with NWEA, 3 Aspens Media conducted an online survey of NWEA members and Hardwood Floors magazine readers, interviewed respondents, analyzed results, and produced this report. Contact info@3aspensmedia.com with questions.

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