



# NO PIECE OF THE PIE

## U.S. FOOD WORKERS IN 2016

The 21.5 million workers in the food system make up the largest employment sector in the United States, with 14% or over one out of every seven workers in the U.S. working along the food chain. In the five key sectors of the food chain — production, processing, distribution, retail, and service — poor working conditions, below average wages, and discriminatory and abusive practices are all commonplace. While overall employment in the food system recovered relatively quickly from the Great Recession of 2007-2009, workers themselves

have not seen positive changes. Since the Food Chain Workers Alliance's 2012 report *The Hands That Feed Us*, wages overall remain stagnant, food workers are accessing food stamps at higher levels, health and safety problems have increased, and membership in unions has declined.



Photo: Forest Woodward

### KEY FINDINGS INCLUDE:

**1 Employment in the food chain is robust and growing.** Fourteen percent of the nation's workforce is employed in the food chain, over one in seven of all workers in the U.S. The number of food chain workers grew by 13% from 2010 to 2016. Employment in the food chain has been growing at a rate more than double that of all other industries over the past 14 years.

**2 Despite employment growth, the food chain pays the lowest hourly median wage to frontline workers compared to workers in all other industries.** The annual median wage for food chain workers is \$16,000 and the hourly median wage is \$10, well below the median wages across all industries of \$36,468 and \$17.53. The 2015 U.S. livable wage is \$15.12 per hour, before taxes.<sup>1</sup>

**3 Food chain workers rely on public assistance and are more food insecure than other workers.** The gap between the percentage of food workers living in poverty and workers in other industries has been growing. Thirteen percent of all food workers, nearly 2.8 million workers, relied on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits (food stamps) to feed their household in 2016. This was 2.2 times the rate of all other industries, a much higher rate than in 2010 when food workers had to use food stamps at 1.8 times the rate of all other industries. Food insecurity in households supported by a food chain worker rose to 4.6 million during the Great Recession.

**4 Most food chain workers are in frontline positions with few opportunities at the top.** Eighty-two percent of food chain workers are in frontline positions.

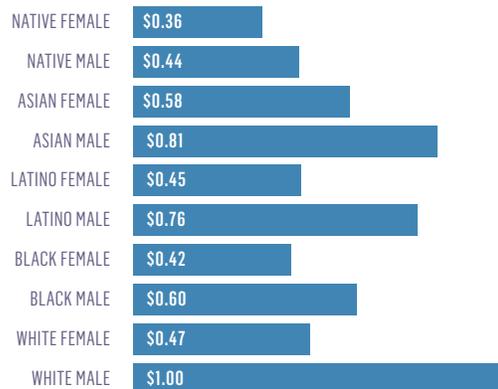
### HOURLY MEDIAN WAGES BY INDUSTRY, 2016



Note: SRC analysis of frontline workers using Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement and Outgoing Rotation Groups (2016).

THE FINDINGS IN THE REPORT *NO PIECE OF THE PIE* come from an analysis of national data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and the U.S. Census Bureau as well as current discussions in academic and policy literature.

## RACIAL AND GENDER WAGE GAP IN THE FOOD CHAIN, 2010-2014



Source: SRC analysis of wage and salary workers in American Community Survey (2010-2014).



## 5 Frontline workers in the food chain are racially and ethnically diverse, but most CEOs are white males.

Seventy-two percent of chief executive officers in the food system are white men. Fourteen percent are white women, and the rest people of color.

## 6 Significant racial and gender wage gaps exist.

For every dollar earned by white men working in the food chain, Latino men earn 76 cents, Black men 60 cents, Asian men 81 cents, and Native men 44 cents. White women earn less than half of their white male counterparts, at 47 cents to every dollar. Women of color face both a racial and a gender penalty: Black women earn 42 cents, Latina women 45 cents, Asian women 58 cents, and Native women 36 cents for every dollar earned by white men.

## 7 Rates of injury and illness at work for food workers have risen since 2010.

Non-fatal rates of workplace-caused injury and illness in food production, one of the food chain's most dangerous sectors, have risen from 4.6 cases per hundred workers in 2010 to 5.5 in 2014.

**8 Food chain workers are members of unions at a steadily decreasing rate.** Only 6% of workers in the food chain are members of a labor union. Union-represented workers today earn 26% more on average than non-union workers and are far more likely to have health and pension benefits.<sup>2</sup>

## WHAT CAN YOU DO:

- 1 Workplace justice campaigns and union drives need the support of consumers to help strengthen food workers' efforts to win better pay and working conditions.** Consumers can get involved in food worker campaigns in a variety of ways, including attending a rally, signing a petition, speaking to an employer, or using social media.
- 2 Consumers can also support food workers by purchasing products from companies that are fair trade, union-made, or have high labor standards.** Look for certification labels that tell you if a food product was made with good labor standards. Fairfacts.thedfta.org provides an evaluation of the major fair trade labels. Also check out the Fair World Project's evaluation of fair trade programs' impacts on farmworkers at [bit.ly/FWP-farmworkers](http://bit.ly/FWP-farmworkers).
- 3 The public can call on policymakers to support pro-worker legislation.** This can range from advocating for labor laws and anti-wage theft bills to procurement policies like the Good Food Purchasing Program (check out [goodfoodcities.org](http://goodfoodcities.org)), as well as pro-worker certification programs like the Fair Food Program and the Agricultural Justice Project.
- 4 People can educate one another and discuss food worker issues in their daily lives, especially in conversations around local, organic, and sustainable food.** Many local food groups and farmers markets do not talk about food workers simply because they are unaware of the issues that workers face. Sign up for the Food Chain Workers Alliance's email list to stay up to date on food worker issues and campaigns.



[foodchainworkers.org](http://foodchainworkers.org)



[solidarityresearch.coop](http://solidarityresearch.coop)

<sup>1</sup> Glasmeier, Amy. 2016. "New Living Wage Calculator 2016." Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology. <http://livingwage.mit.edu/articles/18-new-2015-living-wage-data>.

<sup>2</sup> "Union Members - 2015." 2016. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, January 28. <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.nr0.htm>; "Employee Benefits in the U.S. - March 2016." 2016. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, July 22. <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/ebs2.nr0.htm>.