

# NO PIECE OF THE PIE

## U.S. FOOD WORKERS IN 2016



NOVEMBER 2016

BY FOOD CHAIN WORKERS ALLIANCE + SOLIDARITY RESEARCH COOPERATIVE



**SRC** SOLIDARITY  
RESEARCH  
COOPERATIVE



**THE FOOD CHAIN WORKERS ALLIANCE** is a coalition of worker-based organizations whose members plant, harvest, process, pack, transport, prepare, serve, and sell food, organizing to improve wages and working conditions for all workers along the food chain. The Alliance works together to build a more sustainable food system that respects workers' rights, based on the principles of social, environmental and racial justice, in which everyone has access to healthy and affordable food.

**SOLIDARITY RESEARCH COOPERATIVE** is a solutions agency for worker- and community-based organizations. We are a worker-owned cooperative of researchers, storytellers, and creatives. We have a synergistic relationship with Solidarity Research Center, a nonprofit dedicated to advancing solidarity economies.

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## **U.S. FOOD WORKERS IN 2016**

NOVEMBER 2016

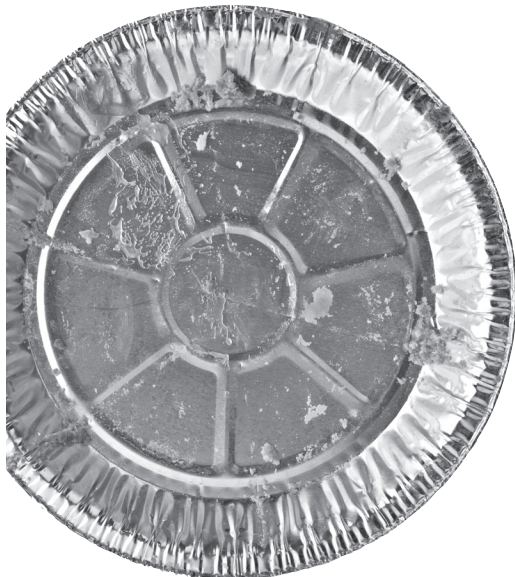
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 21.5 million workers in the food system make up the largest employment sector in the United States, with over one out of every seven workers in the U.S. working along the food chain. This report addresses the challenges faced by these workers in the five key sectors of the food chain: production, processing, distribution, retail, and service. The findings in this report demonstrate that poor working conditions, below average wages, and discriminatory and abusive practices are all commonplace across the food chain. It also updates the findings of the 2012 *The Hands that Feed Us* report, which detailed the poor wages and working conditions that the majority of food workers face. 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 2012 report, 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.

The findings in this report 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. Research for this report also included original in-depth interviews with 20 food workers across all five sectors of the food chain from member organizations of the Food Chain Workers Alliance.

## 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 percent from 2010 to 2016.
- 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.
- 3 Food chain workers rely on public assistance and are more food insecure than other workers.** 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.

**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.<sup>1</sup> 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 six percent of workers in the food chain are members of a labor union.

The interviews with workers across the food system reveal what employment in the food sector looks like in practice. Workers consistently speak of hard work and low pay. Numbers on employment and wages do not fully describe the routine challenges that food workers face, including a lack of benefits such as healthcare and paid sick days, inadequate job training for health and safety issues, and erratic schedules that vary between too much work and not enough. All of the workers interviewed for this report cited the pressure that accompanies food system work. Between the speed and pace of work, volatile schedules, and poor treatment, food workers experience the daily stresses of unpredictable, underpaid employment.

Significant changes are necessary in order to address issues of poor wages and working conditions across the food system. Raising minimum wages, mandating benefits, and ensuring protection for their right to organize will ensure that workers have the capacity to feed their families, protect their own personal health, and produce our food in fair working conditions. Strengthening and enforcing labor regulations will help to raise standards for all workers by not allowing bad actors to undercut honest employers. Both policymakers and consumers can take steps to improve job conditions across the food system.

## POLICYMAKERS

- 1 Minimum wages must be increased, and the tipped minimum wage for workers in the food service sector and the piece rate pay system in all sectors should be abolished.** Policies for \$15 per hour are being enacted in cities and states across the country, and all parts of the U.S. should follow suit. Wage increases should be indexed for inflation.
- 2 Affordable healthcare must be provided for all workers.** This is not only to ensure that workers remain healthy, but will also help to improve overall public health and food safety issues.
- 3 Paid sick leave legislation enables workers to stay home from work when they are unhealthy.** While some localities have enacted paid sick leave for larger businesses, many workers remain without this important benefit.
- 4 Research shows that anti-wage theft legislation can greatly reduce the amount of money stolen from paychecks provided the legislation is strong, penalties are high, and the laws are enforced.** Policymakers should strengthen these laws and use permit and licensing powers to punish employers who routinely steal wages.
- 5 The right to organize should be guaranteed for workers throughout the food system, including protection from retaliation.** Collective bargaining leads to higher wages and benefits and a stronger voice on the job around issues such as health and safety. Policymakers should actively support on-the-ground organizing efforts as well as legislation to strengthen labor laws.

## CONSUMERS

- 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 ([goodfoodcities.org](http://goodfoodcities.org)), as well as pro-worker certification programs like the Fair Food Program and the Agricultural Justice Project. Policymakers are ultimately responsible to the voting public, and lobbying representatives can often influence their policy decisions.
- 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.





## SECTION 1

# INTRODUCTION

The 21.5 million workers in the food system make up the largest employment sector in the United States with over one out of seven workers in the U.S. working along the food chain. This report addresses the challenges faced by these workers in the five key segments of the food system: production, processing, distribution, retail, and service. It also updates the findings of the 2012 *The Hands that Feed Us* report, which detailed the poor wages and working conditions that the majority of food workers face. Four years later, these conditions have not improved, and in some ways have gotten worse: the rate of food workers, compared to all other workers accessing food stamps, has risen, union density has gone down, and rates of injuries in the food system have gone up. The findings in this report demonstrate that poor working conditions, below average wages, and discriminatory and abusive practices are all commonplace across the food chain.

## OVERVIEW OF THE FOOD SYSTEM & FOOD WORKERS

The food system is the largest sector of employment in the U.S. economy. Food workers are 14 percent of the nation's workforce, or 21,505,450 workers total.<sup>2</sup> The workforce in food-related industries increased by 13 percent from 2010 to 2016.<sup>3</sup> Food-related industries are the third largest contributor to U.S. gross output after manufacturing and the financial sector, generating approximately \$3.5 trillion, or more than 11 percent of the annual total.<sup>4</sup> The average household spends approximately 10 percent of its yearly pre-tax income—over \$7,000—on food expenses.<sup>5</sup>

Human labor is a central component at every step of the chain, which includes production, processing, distribution, retail, and service. Food workers include laborers in fields and fisheries (production), bakers and slaughterhouse workers (processing), drivers and warehouse workers (distribution), grocery store cashiers and stockers (retail), and restaurant servers, cooks, dishwashers, and street vendors (service). While some of these workers routinely interact with consumers, many of them—and their job site conditions—remain hidden, whether in remote agricultural fields, behind the closed doors of processing facilities, or in the back of restaurants and retail stores.

The vast majority of these are low-wage jobs. The hourly median wage for frontline food workers is the lowest in the U.S. economy at \$10 per hour, far below the \$17.53 median for all other industries.<sup>6</sup>



**QUICK FACTS PRODUCTION**

<b>SIZE</b> (OES, 2015) 2.5 million workers 12% of labor in the food chain	<b>CEO-TO-WORKER INDEX</b> (OES, 2015) 1:1,245 — 1 CEO for every 1,245 frontline workers
<b>FRONTLINE WAGES</b> (CPS, 2016) Annual median wage \$18,657 Hourly median wage \$11	<b>UNION DENSITY</b> (CPS, 2015) 1.4% union members 2% covered by contract

**QUICK FACTS PROCESSING**

<b>SIZE</b> (OES, 2015) 1.8 million workers 8% of labor in the food chain	<b>CEO-TO-WORKER INDEX</b> (OES, 2015) 1:524 — 1 CEO for every 524 frontline workers
<b>FRONTLINE WAGES</b> (CPS, 2016) Annual median wage \$28,000 Hourly median wage \$13	<b>UNION DENSITY</b> (CPS, 2015) 12.7% union membership 13.3% covered by contract

**QUICK FACTS DISTRIBUTION**

<b>SIZE</b> (OES, 2015) 3.3 million workers 15% labor in the food chain	<b>CEO-TO-WORKER INDEX</b> (OES, 2015) 1:539 — 1 CEO for every 539 frontline workers
<b>FRONTLINE WAGES</b> (CPS, 2016) Annual median wage \$35,000 Hourly median wage \$14	<b>UNION DENSITY</b> (CPS, 2015) 8.1% union membership 8.9% covered by contract

**QUICK FACTS RETAIL**

<b>Size</b> (OES, 2015) 3.1 million workers 14% of labor in the food chain	<b>CEO-TO-WORKER INDEX</b> (OES, 2015) 1:1,967 — 1 CEO for every 1,967 frontline workers
<b>FRONTLINE WAGES</b> (CPS, 2016) Annual median wage \$15,000 Hourly median wage \$10	<b>UNION DENSITY</b> (CPS, 2015) 13.9% union membership 14.7% covered by contract

**QUICK FACTS SERVICE**

<b>SIZE</b> (OES, 2015) 11 million workers 51% of labor in the food chain	<b>CEO-TO-WORKER INDEX</b> (OES, 2015) 1:3,945 1 CEO for every 3,945 frontline workers
<b>FRONTLINE WAGES</b> (CPS, 2016) Annual median wage \$12,000 Hourly median wage \$9.30	<b>UNION DENSITY</b> (CPS, 2015) 1.6% union membership 2% covered by contract

Meanwhile, the food system as a whole has undergone a substantial increase in employment, outpacing the annual growth rate in all other industries since 2003. This includes the years of the Great Recession, when the economy as a whole was experiencing negative growth. Moreover, these developments take place within the context of a large and expanding low-wage economy: 42 percent of all workers in the United States make less than \$15 per hour, while almost 30 percent of the workforce rely on public assistance to subsidize wages.<sup>7</sup> Government projections through 2024 indicate that the wages of over 80 percent of new jobs outside of management and professionals will fall below the national average.<sup>8</sup>

## THE FIVE SECTORS OF THE FOOD CHAIN

### PRODUCTION

The 2,482,280 workers in food production oversee the first steps in the food system, including planting and harvesting agricultural products and raising livestock such as chickens, fish, and cattle.<sup>9</sup> While some fruits and vegetables may go directly to consumer markets, other products may be used for processing, such as grain for flour or corn for animal feed. Median hourly wages for frontline production workers is \$11 per hour, with a median annual wage of \$18,657. Only 60 percent of food production workers report working more than 180 days per year.<sup>10</sup>

### PROCESSING

The processing sector employs 1,754,130 workers who turn the raw goods from production into foods that are ready for consumers to eat. Processing work can happen at many scales, from handmade artisanal products to food produced on assembly lines. Workers in slaughterhouses and animal processing plants are included in this category. Median hourly wages for frontline processing sector workers is \$13 per hour, with a median annual wage of \$28,000 per year.

### DISTRIBUTION

The transportation and warehousing of food products is performed by 3,252,680 distribution workers. Such work happens between the various stages of the system as food is produced, processed, and sold. In addition to transportation, this category



also includes warehousing, refrigeration, and logistics. Median hourly wages for frontline distribution workers is \$14 per hour, with a median annual wage of \$35,000. Transportation and warehousing all together had a higher hourly median wage (\$19.31).<sup>11</sup>

## RETAIL

The retail sector employs 3,053,560 workers who sell food directly to consumers at supermarkets, grocery stores, and convenience stores. Workers in this category include all those who perform their jobs at retail locations, including in-house processing workers, such as cooks and bakers, and service and maintenance workers. Median hourly wages for frontline retail workers outside of managers and executives is \$10 per hour, with a median annual wage of \$15,000.

## SERVICE

The service sector is the largest part of the food system in terms of employment, with 10,962,800 workers. Employees in service settings prepare, cook, and serve food, bartend, and wash dishes. This sector includes full-service restaurants, casual dining, catering companies, food trucks, and institutional food services such as cafeterias and dining halls. Median hourly wages for frontline service workers is \$9.30 per hour, with a median annual wage of \$12,000.

## THE CONTEXT OF THE FOOD SYSTEM

### RACISM

The modern food system is inseparable from the legacy of slavery and the 20th-century inheritance of racism and oppression. The latter includes the use of indentured laborers from Asia, impoverished Black sharecroppers in the South, and small farmers driven from their homes during the Dust Bowl. New Deal legislation in the 1930s introduced a host of important labor regulations and protections, including the right to organize unions. However, jobs that were dominated by Black workers such as agricultural and domestic work were intentionally left out of the laws. During World War II, Mexican laborers were brought to U.S. fields to work under the bracero program, described by Department of Labor official Lee Williams as a system of “legalized slavery.”<sup>12</sup> This program set the stage for the contemporary reliance on undocumented immigrants in farm work.



Photo: Restaurant Opportunities Center of New York

### RESTAURANT WORKERS ESTIMATES

We defined food chain workers on the basis of food-related industries in this report. The Restaurant Opportunities Centers United estimates that there are 12.6 million restaurant workers on the basis of food preparation and serving occupations. Many restaurant workers are employed outside of establishments formally identified as eating and drinking places, such as at workplace cafeterias. 12.6 million is a more comprehensive estimate of the size of the workforce that prepares and serves our food and drink across industries.

## THE GOOD FOOD MOVEMENT

The rise of industrial food production has sparked a renewed interest in how food is made and where it comes from. With roots in environmentalism, food safety, and anti-hunger politics, the “food movement” calls for more sustainable, healthy, and affordable food. While prominent food writers such as Mark Bittman, Anna Lappé, and Michael Pollan have discussed the need to incorporate food worker issues into the growing consumer food movement, the importance of “good jobs” is often lost within consumer calls for “good food.”<sup>13</sup> With slogans such as “know your farmer” and “buy local,” the consumer food movement has made a powerful impact on how some consumers think about their purchasing decisions. To the extent that it has also provided room for thinking about access to healthy food for low-income communities, the consumer food movement provides a valuable inroad to questions of equity. However, this report shows that more attention needs to be paid to the issues that workers face throughout the food chain.

In terms of slogans and strategies for change, the consumer food movement is largely driven by educated, middle-class consumers who have the resources to make alternative purchasing decisions.<sup>14</sup> This is problematic for two reasons. First, local food perspectives can emphasize the role of small farmers and producers who are often white and ignores the challenges that most food workers face throughout the food system, especially workers of color.<sup>15</sup> Second, the focus on consumption elevates the power of purchasing decisions made by middle-class white consumers over the power of workers and their supporters to address food system challenges, both at their places of work and within government.<sup>16</sup> It should be acknowledged, however, that growing calls for food justice and food sovereignty, often locally based and led by people of color, seek to inject questions of equity into the wider movement.<sup>17</sup> An example of this work can be seen in the discussion of the HEAL Food Alliance (see page 9).

This report argues for an approach to these issues which combines the consumer food movement’s concerns about access to good food with important questions about the political, social, and economic foundations of the entire system. By thinking about *food justice* rather than “good food,” we can work to ensure “that the benefits and costs of where, what, and how food is grown and priced, transported and distributed, and accessed and eaten are shared fairly.”<sup>18</sup> Many workers, consumers, and citizens are using the energy of the consumer food movement to challenge the low wages and poor conditions that characterize the food system through innovative campaigns and improvements to public policies. When consumers and workers build alliances, we can have good food *and* good jobs.

## SEXISM

The relegation of women to lesser economic and social roles in the U.S. is reflected in the organization of labor in the food system. Historically, women’s work has been devalued due to patriarchal systems that view their labor as less valuable than that of men.<sup>19</sup> While women perform the majority of food-related work both in the home and in the food system, they are less likely to be decision makers, to hold positions of authority, or to be paid fairly for their work. Culturally, women experience a complicated relationship with food at the personal level due to social norms. Women are the unpaid and often undervalued food workers in the home.<sup>20</sup> While both women and people of color are the lowest paid workers in the food system, gender is more significant than race in terms of its impact on low wages for agricultural, production, retail, and service work.<sup>21</sup> In the restaurant industry, both white women and women of color are segregated by job function and earn the lowest wages overall.<sup>22</sup> The barriers to advancement can include sexual discrimination, a lack of training or social networks, and few options for childcare.<sup>23</sup>

## CONSOLIDATION

The various sectors of the industrial food system are often dominated by a handful of large corporations. Concentration is considerable in meat processing and in food retail, for example, where there have recently been sweeping consolidations as companies struggle to compete with corporate giants.<sup>24</sup> These businesses argue that consolidation will increase efficiency, lower prices, and improve customer service. In reality, consolidation gives a small number of companies enormous control over how food is produced, transported, and sold, while exerting downward pressure on wages and undermining unionization.

A striking example of this is Walmart, the largest grocery store chain and corporation in the world. When Walmart demands that suppliers keep costs low, companies along the food chain must respond in order to remain in business. This often results in a domino effect of depressed wages, lower unionization rates, and worse working conditions throughout the food system.<sup>25</sup> Walmart’s employment practices also set the tone for many competing businesses in the retail sector, as its low wages help keep costs low and exert pressure on their competition. These low wages come at a price for society, however: research demonstrates that taxpayers subsidize Walmart

through programs such as health insurance, public housing, and food assistance provided to their employees to the tune of \$900,000 to \$1.7 million dollars for every store per year.<sup>26</sup>

## DECLINE IN UNION MEMBERSHIP AND COVERAGE

An important factor contributing to the wages and working conditions in the food system is the level of workforce unionization, or union density. Nearly all sectors of the U.S. economy have experienced a decrease in unionization over the past several decades as employers have resisted workers' organizing efforts and restructured their operations via increased automation, subcontracting, and global outsourcing. While 20.5 percent of workers in the U.S. were covered by a union contract in 1985, union density overall is 12.3 percent today, and 7.4 percent in the private sector.

The food system also experienced a decline in unionization over this period and lower union density overall, from 16.5 percent in 1985 to 6.6 percent today. The higher union density

### HEAL FOOD ALLIANCE

As this report documents, our nation's food system serves the interests of a select few at the expense of millions of hard-working families across the country. How we produce, process, and consume food has a bigger impact on the health and well-being of workers and consumers than any other human activity. At the same time, healthy food is unaffordable for many Americans. This has led to spiking rates of obesity and diet-related diseases, adding \$200 billion dollars each year to our national health care bill. Taken together, the exploitation of workers, damages to the environment, and the financial pressures on farmers requires that potential solutions to food system problems embrace a multi-sector approach.

The Health, Environment, Agriculture, and Labor (HEAL) Food Alliance was formed to take on this formidable challenge. Founded by the Food Chain Workers Alliance, Movement Strategy Center, Real Food Generation, and the Union of Concerned Scientists, the HEAL Food Alliance is leading a long-term, multi-pronged effort to transform the U.S. food and agriculture system so that it is healthier, more sustainable, and more equitable. Leaders from each of these organizations serve as HEAL's Anchor Team, which has expanded to include the National Black Food and Justice Alliance. The team is responsible for developing the strategic vision and organizational building blocks necessary to build a broad-based movement to reform our food system.

Crafted by 50 organizations representing rural and urban farmers, fisherfolk, food chain workers, rural and urban communities, scientists, public health advocates, environmentalists, and indigenous groups, the HEAL Food Alliance published a 10-plank platform that serves as a call to action and a political compass for transformation.



### ECONOMY

- 1 Ensure Dignity for Food Workers and their Families**  
Including living wages, fair working conditions, and worker-approved regulations and enforcement
- 2 Provide Opportunities for All Producers**  
Including access to land, loans, assistance, and markets for diverse producers
- 3 Ensure Fair and Competitive Markets**  
Regulate corporate control over our food system and ensure that farmers receive fair pricing
- 4 Strengthen Regional Economies**  
Forge connections through regional food distribution owned and operated by community members



### HEALTH

- 5 Dump the Junk**  
Regulate the marketing of junk food and beverages
- 6 Make Real Food the Norm in Every Neighborhood**  
Ensure access to healthy, safe, affordable, fair, and culturally appropriate food for all
- 7 Increase Food Literacy**  
Expand food systems knowledge and action for youth, consumers, and policymakers



### ENVIRONMENT

- 8 Phase Out Factory Farming**  
Close confined animal feeding operations and reduce monocrop commodity production
- 9 Promote Sustainable Farming, Fishing & Ranching**  
Encourage the integration of the best of cutting edge agroecological science with the best of time-honored indigenous wisdom and agricultural traditions
- 10 Close the Loop**  
Internalize the environmental, social, and economic costs of food production and distribution



sectors of food processing, distribution, and retail in particular have seen dramatic decreases over this time period. Nonetheless, union-represented workers today earn 26 percent more on average than non-union workers and are far more likely to have health and pension benefits.<sup>27</sup> The recovery of previous levels of unionization would significantly improve the average wages and working conditions in the industry.



## GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION

U.S. labor laws have historically facilitated cheap labor and oppressive conditions within the food system, although the lack of regulations is often equally damaging.<sup>28</sup> Even when labor protections exist, enforcement can be weak or absent.<sup>29</sup> The government intervenes in food production more directly through major subsidies of agricultural goods, especially corn and soy. Large, profitable farms receive over 70 percent of subsidy payments, which encourages further consolidation of farms into large-scale agribusiness.<sup>30</sup> In short, government policies incentivize an industrial food system that is highly consolidated and emboldened to produce cheap, processed foods.

## METHODS

The findings in this report 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. Research for this report also included original in-depth interviews with 20 food workers across all five sectors of the food chain from member organizations of the Food Chain Workers Alliance. A full discussion of the methods can be found in the appendices.



## SECTION 2

# RESULTS

### FINDINGS OVERVIEW

*No Piece of the Pie: U.S. Food Workers in 2016* builds on the Food Chain Workers Alliance's report in 2012 *The Hands that Feed Us: Challenges and Opportunities for Workers Along the Food Chain*,<sup>31</sup> the first-ever comprehensive report about workers throughout the food system. Using updated information from a variety of government data sets and in-depth interviews, *No Piece of the Pie* examines how low wages, poor employment practices, and substandard conditions for workers continue to define work across the food chain. The past five years have seen a rise in public interest about issues of low-wage work—from nationwide actions around minimum wages to rigorous policy discussions about working conditions. Given its location as both the largest area of employment and a site of renewed interest by consumers, the food system offers real opportunities to change both the food we produce and the conditions under which it is made.

### 2012 REPORT OVERVIEW

*The Hands the Feed Us* provided an in-depth look at the employment conditions and experiences of workers across the food system. Drawing on a blend of data sources—including multiple government data sets, 47 in-depth interviews with employers and 18 with workers, and an original survey of 629 workers—the report detailed how food work is characterized by poor wages and working conditions, with limited opportunities for advancement.

The data on wages and conditions was striking. The survey data indicated that 86 percent of jobs in the food system offer very low wages, with a median of \$9.65 per hour.<sup>32</sup> Many workers also faced difficult working conditions, with 40 percent working more than 40 hours per week, and almost a third not receiving lunch breaks.<sup>33</sup> Lack of access to employer health insurance and sick days meant that many of the workers who farm, process, transport, cook, and sell the food that we eat reported to work even when sick. Low wages and a lack of benefits impacted the ability to afford the cost of living, with food workers using food stamps at over one and a half times the rate of the rest of the U.S. workforce.

Food workers routinely faced illegal and unsafe practices at their jobs. Over a third of all workers experienced wage theft in any given week, and over half suffered an injury or health problem while on the job.<sup>34</sup> Low-wage workers are particularly vulnerable to problems of wage theft and health and safety violations, and many advocates claim that even the enforcement

of our current laws would go far to increase the safety and livelihood of most workers.<sup>35</sup>

Workers also faced few opportunities to advance towards living wage jobs. Career advancement remained a possibility in a handful of employment categories, including some restaurant work, grocery store employment, and meat processing. However, these opportunities were typically limited to white male employees, who made up the majority of supervisory and managerial positions and commanded the highest wages.<sup>36</sup> The potential for advancement was limited for the immigrants and people of color who made up significant proportions of low-wage workers in the food system.

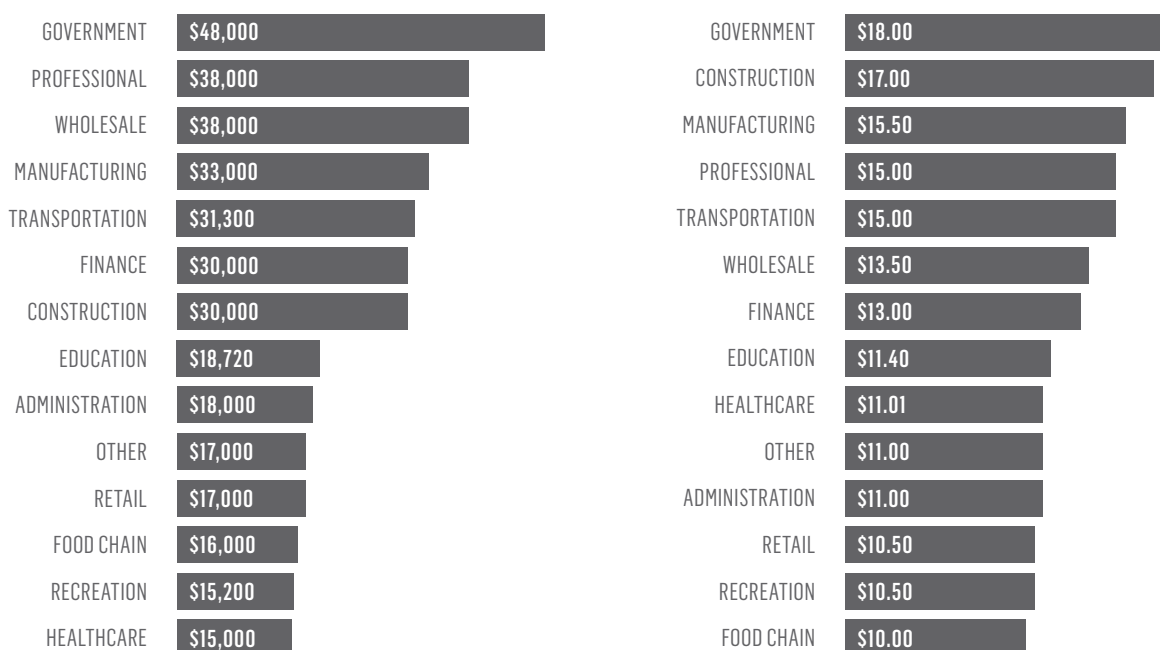
## FOOD WORKERS IN 2016

The data in this report reveals a food system that continues to grow in terms of employment, and yet is beset by stagnant wages, poor working conditions, a lack of benefits, health and safety issues, and mistreatment at work. While the median wages for all workers have risen in the past four years, wages in all five major food industries remain below the national median. In fact, the median annual and hourly wages for workers in the food system are the third lowest and lowest, respectively, in the economy at \$16,000 per year and \$10 per hour (see Figure 1). Moreover, since 2003, the economy has seen a 19 percent rise in labor productivity, while food system wages have remained stagnant in comparison.<sup>37</sup>

Practices like temporary labor contracting have spread from farms to other sectors of the food system, including warehouses, logistics, food manufacturing, processing, and food service. An example of this trend can be seen at the Taylor Farms processing plants in Tracy, California,

FIGURE 1

### ANNUAL AND 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).



where at least half of the workers are employed by temporary staffing agencies. This strategy allows companies to avoid paying higher wages and removes liability for health insurance and other benefits. Companies that use temporary workers are more likely to employ low-wage workers with no formal training, recent immigrants, or new entrants into the job market.<sup>38</sup> While these practices help companies, they leave workers without job security or a sense of control over their lives. Given that almost 82 percent of the vast majority of food workers are frontline employees, such “just in time” practices are likely to dominate most industries.

Without significant changes to workplace conditions, treatment, and wages, workers in the food system will have few opportunities for upward mobility. The past five years have shown that workers, consumers, and citizens are willing and able to fight for better jobs and for public policies that lift standards for workers and encourage better practices. This report describes how worksite and policy campaigns have tremendous potential to engage consumers as citizens, improve the quality of food that we eat, and increase the standards for workers at all stages in the food system.

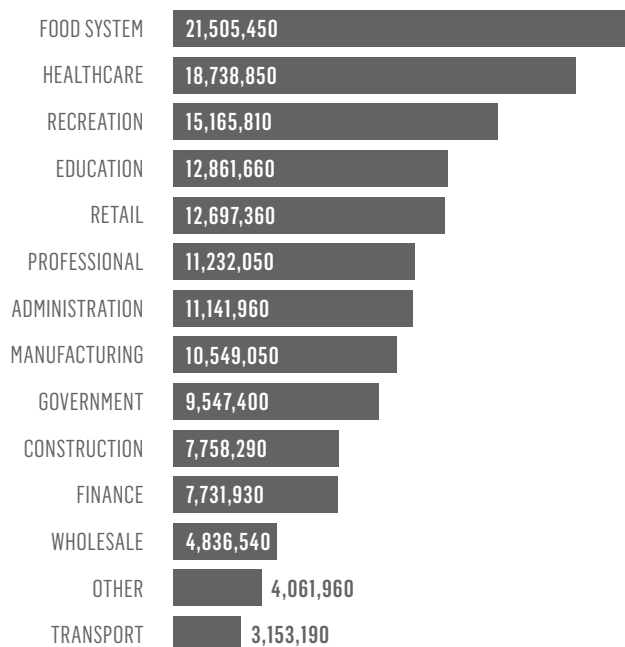
## KEY FINDINGS

### 1) EMPLOYMENT IN THE FOOD CHAIN IS ROBUST AND GROWING

In 2015, the food system employed over 21.5 million workers, making it the largest source of employment in the U.S. In other words, more than 14 percent of all U.S. workers, over one in seven, are supporting the country's food system (see Figure 2). As a point of comparison, healthcare workers made up 12 percent of total employment and recreation 10 percent. Within the food system, 11 million workers are in the food service sector, comprising more than half of the food chain (see Figure 3). Of the remaining food workers, 15 percent are in distribution, 14 percent in retail, 12 percent in production, and 8 percent in processing. With such a large percentage of U.S. workers employed in the food chain, the wages and conditions have a major impact on overall workplace trends as well as the economy in general. This is especially true because employment in the food chain has been growing at a rate more than double that of all other industries over the past 14 years.

FIGURE 2

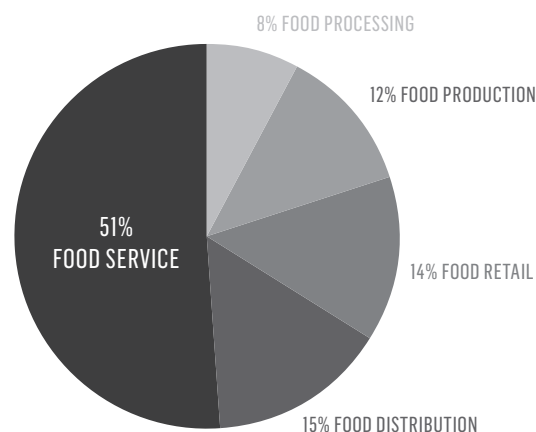
#### TOTAL EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY, 2015



Source: SRC analysis of Occupational Employment Statistics (2015)

FIGURE 3

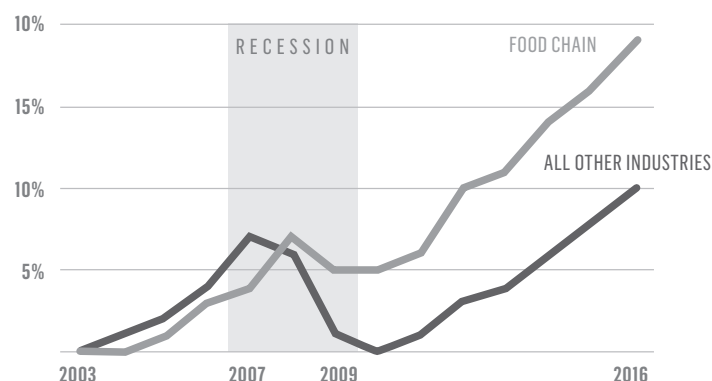
#### FOOD CHAIN WORKERS BY SECTOR, 2015



Source: SRC analysis of Occupational Employment Statistics (2015)

FIGURE 4

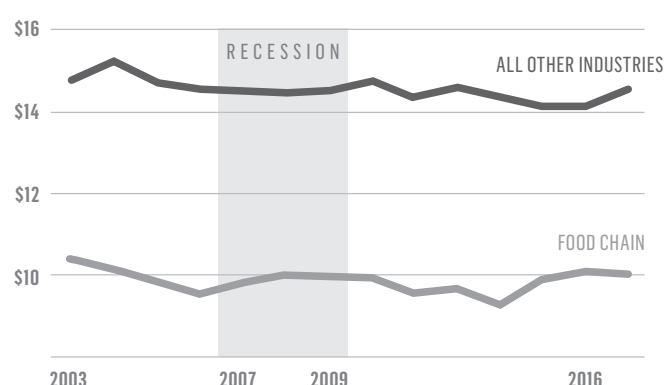
### EMPLOYMENT CHANGE IN FOOD CHAIN AND ALL OTHER INDUSTRIES, 2003-2016



Source: SRC analysis of wage and salary workers using 2003 employment level as an index and 2014 as a moving average with Current Population Survey, Annual Social & Economic Supplement (2003-2016).

FIGURE 5

### HOURLY MEDIAN WAGES FOR FOOD CHAIN AND ALL OTHER INDUSTRIES, 2003-2016



Source: SRC analysis of wage and salary workers using Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Groups (2003-2016) in 2016 dollars.

In the four years that have passed since the 2012 publication of *The Hands that Feed Us*, the economy as a whole has been recovering from high levels of unemployment due to the Great Recession. All industries except for the food chain lost six percent of total employment during the recession. The food system, on the other hand, lost only 1.5 percent of total employment and recovered much more quickly. Between 2003 and 2016, food worker employment increased by 19 percent while private industries expanded by only 10 percent (see Figure 4).

The effects of the Great Recession varied in severity across the food system. The food retail sector quickly reversed job losses and increased employment by seven percent in 2012. Food manufacturing remained constant in employment levels at the start of the recession and expanded by four percent at its end. Employment recovery in food production and service rebounded in 2010 and 2011.

## 2) DESPITE GROWTH, FOOD SYSTEM EMPLOYERS PAY LOWEST HOURLY MEDIAN WAGE TO FRONTLINE WORKERS

The working people who comprise the food chain have felt little of the economic recovery in their lives. Given the rebounding employment numbers post-recession, one might assume that wage gains for frontline workers would have followed suit. Yet wages in the food system remain much lower than the median wage across the economy. Even during the Great Recession, median U.S. hourly wages increased from 2007 to 2009. However, median hourly earnings for food workers dipped below \$10 even before the downturn officially began in 2007 (see Figure 5). Wages did not recover to their pre-downturn levels until 2015, six years after the recession ended. In addition, while the U.S. as a whole enjoyed a four percent boost in median household income in 2016, food system incomes only rose by two percent.<sup>39</sup>

Food chain employers continue to pay the lowest hourly median wage of all industries, public and private, with an hourly median wage of \$10 per hour. The annual median wage for a frontline worker in the food chain was \$16,000 per year with variation across the five sec-

TABLE 1

## HOURLY MEDIAN WAGES FOR FRONTLINE WORKERS BY FOOD SECTOR, 2003-2016

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<b>PRODUCTION</b>	\$9.73	\$9.86	\$10.09	\$10.66	\$9.50	\$9.70	\$9.18	\$9.86	\$10.62	\$9.88	\$9.48	\$10.09	\$10.07	\$11.00
<b>PROCESSING</b>	\$12.98	\$12.26	\$12.53	\$13.03	\$13.82	\$13.59	\$14.41	\$14.24	\$14.75	\$12.95	\$13.33	\$14.26	\$13.10	\$13.00
<b>DISTRIBUTION</b>	\$14.04	\$15.17	\$15.65	\$14.21	\$13.82	\$15.53	\$14.47	\$16.43	\$13.80	\$13.31	\$13.33	\$14.37	\$13.10	\$14.00
<b>RETAIL</b>	\$9.73	\$10.11	\$9.96	\$9.48	\$9.79	\$9.98	\$9.93	\$9.70	\$9.55	\$9.88	\$9.23	\$9.08	\$9.57	\$10.00
<b>SERVICE</b>	\$8.45	\$8.22	\$8.25	\$8.05	\$8.06	\$8.71	\$8.63	\$8.76	\$8.49	\$8.32	\$8.20	\$8.07	\$9.07	\$9.30

Note: SRC analysis of frontline workers using Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Groups (2003-2016), in 2016 dollars.

tors (see Table 1).<sup>40</sup> Frontline food service workers earned the lowest wages, with an annual median wage of \$12,000 and an hourly wage of \$9.30. Rank and file workers in the food retail sector earned the second lowest wages, with an annual median wage of \$15,000 and an hourly median of \$10. Frontline workers in the production sector were paid the third lowest wages, with an annual median wage of \$18,657 and an hourly wage of \$11. Processing and distribution compensated frontline workers at a slightly higher rate, with annual median wages of \$28,000 and \$35,000 respectively, corresponding to hourly rates of \$13 and \$14. While these wages are high for the food system, rank and file wages in processing and distribution are still below the U.S. median wages across all industries, which stand at \$36,468 per year or \$17.53 per hour.

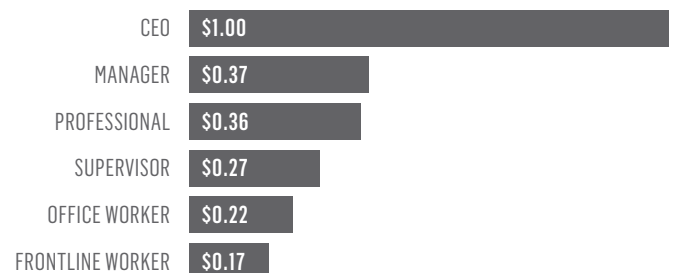
With more than half of all food system workers making less than \$10 per hour, pay is far below the 2015 U.S. livable wage of \$15.12 per hour, before taxes.<sup>41</sup> In contrast to these low wages, in government, the highest-paying U.S. industry, median pay is \$48,000 per year and \$18.00 per hour.<sup>42</sup> A comparable rank-and-file worker in construction would earn nearly double the typical food worker, bringing in \$30,000 per year and \$17 per hour.

The low pay in the food system is not evenly shared across all positions. Food system CEOs enjoy an annual median wage of \$120,000, a salary on par with their CEO peers in other industries.<sup>43</sup> This is similar to industries such as finance, manufacturing, and professional services.

The wage gap between frontline workers and executives is significant. Today, CEOs in the food system make about six times that of a frontline worker (see Figure 6). For every dollar earned

FIGURE 6

## CEO-TO-WORKER WAGE INDEX, 2016



Source: SRC analysis of wage and salary workers using Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Groups (2016).

FIGURE 7

### PUBLIC ASSISTANCE FOR FOOD CHAIN WORKERS, 2003-2016



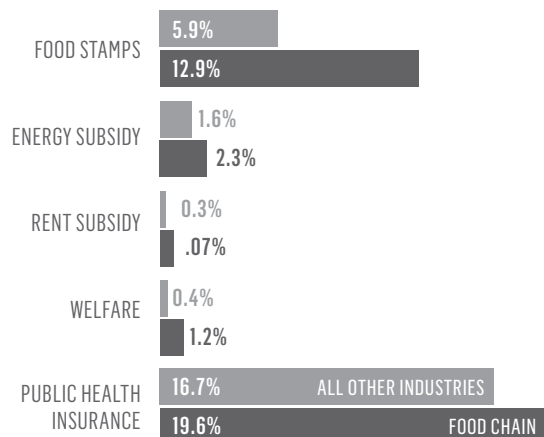
Note: SRC analysis of wage and salary workers from Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement (2003-2016) and 2014 is a moving average.

by a food CEO, a frontline worker brings home 17 cents. In addition, while half of the CEOs earn \$120,000 a year, some food system executives make much more. For instance, while food system workers were hit hard by the recession, Howard Shultz, CEO of Starbucks and the top paid food system executive, made \$366 million between 2009 and 2013.<sup>44</sup>

While the difference in pay was most striking between the peak and base of the pyramid, it held true through every occupational level. Managers and professionals in the food system earn just more than 35 cents to every dollar made by CEOs; supervisors and office workers bring home 27 cents and 22 cents, respectively, for every dollar earned by a chief executive officer.

FIGURE 8

### PUBLIC ASSISTANCE FOR FOOD CHAIN WORKERS AND ALL OTHER INDUSTRIES, 2016



Source: SRC analysis of wage and salary workers from Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement (2016).

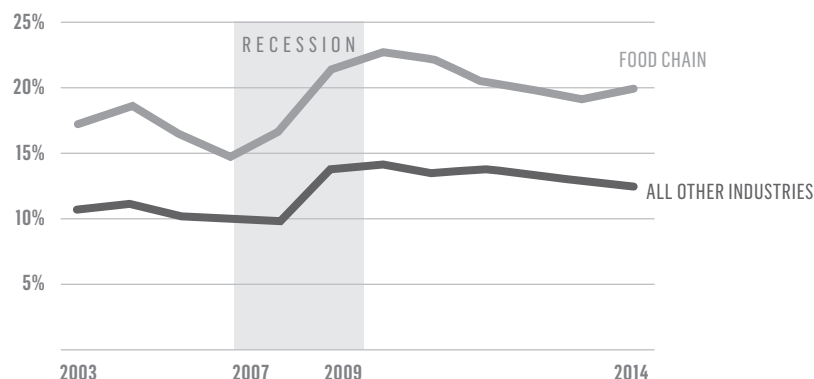
### 3) FOOD CHAIN WORKERS RELY ON PUBLIC ASSISTANCE AND ARE FOOD INSECURE

Low pay has consequences. Frontline food workers are struggling to make ends meet. In 2010, 11 percent of food system workers were on food stamps—now known as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, an important indicator of economic insecurity—compared to six percent of workers in other industries (see Figure 7). By 2016, 13 percent of food workers, equal to nearly 2.8 million people, were on food stamps, compared with six percent across other industries. Food workers therefore use food stamps at 2.2 times the rate of all other industries, a tremendous increase from 1.8 times the rate of all other industries in 2010. This reveals that there is a growing



FIGURE 9

### FOOD INSECURE HOUSEHOLDS FOR THE FOOD CHAIN AND ALL OTHER INDUSTRIES, 2003-2014



Source: SRC analysis of wage and salary workers from Current Population Survey, Food Security Supplement (2003-2014).

gap between the percentage of food workers living in poverty and workers in other industries.

Looking closely at 2016, food workers relied on public assistance programs for basic needs at a greater rate than the general population (see Figure 8). Employers are shifting what should be their costs — living wages — onto taxpayers by paying such low wages that food workers are forced to use public assistance programs.

More than 15 million households (13 percent) in the U.S. lacked food security in 2015 and experienced difficulty securing enough food for all their family members due to limited resources.<sup>45</sup> The irony for workers in the food chain, who make it possible for us to eat, is that 4.3 million, or almost 20 percent, lacked food security in 2014 (see Figure 9).

Looking at households supported by a food chain worker, more than 2.5 million experienced low food security in 2014 (previously referred to by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as *food insecurity without hunger*), while over 1.7 million were very low in food security (previously labeled *food insecurity with hunger*).<sup>46</sup> Households who experience food insecurity reported reductions in the quality, variety, or desirability of their diets. However, those with very low food security also didn't have money for food and reduced their intake.

Food insecurity increased for workers in the food system during the Great Recession. Between 2007 and 2008, food insecure households increased from 3.5 million to 4.6 million. Over 1.7 million households experienced very low food security in 2008, compared to 1.2 million in 2007. As of 2014, food insecurity had not returned to pre-recession levels.

#### 4) MOST FOOD CHAIN WORKERS ARE IN FRONTLINE POSITIONS WITH FEW OPPORTUNITIES AT THE TOP

Labor in the food chain can be represented by a pyramid, with over 16 million, or 82 percent, of all food chain workers concentrated on the bottom rungs as frontline workers. This means that for every one job as a chief executive officer in the food industry, there are 1,465 frontline workers (see Figure 10). In 2015, 0.06 percent of those employed in the food system

FIGURE 10

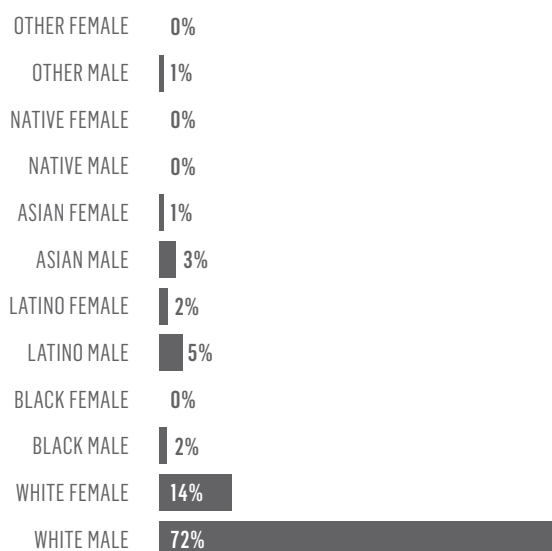
## EMPLOYMENT BY POSITION IN THE FOOD CHAIN, 2015



Source: SRC analysis of Occupational Employment Statistics (2015).

FIGURE 11

## FOOD CHAIN CEOs BY RACE AND GENDER, 2010-2014



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

worked as CEOs, and fewer than 10 percent were managers and supervisors, offering little room for workers to advance to top positions.

Sectors in the food chain vary in their ratios of workers to CEOs. Food service has the greatest number of frontline workers per CEO, with almost 4,000 rank and file workers to one CEO. With close to 2,000 frontline workers for every CEO, food retail comes in second. In food production, there are more than 1,200 workers for every CEO. Processing and distribution has slightly higher rates of CEOs to workers, with more than 500 workers per CEO in these sectors.

### 5) FRONTLINE FOOD WORKERS ARE RACIALLY DIVERSE AND EDUCATED, BUT WHITE MEN ARE IN LEADERSHIP

Food chain workers are diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, and education. Racial and ethnic diversity in the food chain reflect the broader demographic trend predicted by the Pew Research Center that by 2055 the nation will not have one single racial or ethnic majority.<sup>47</sup> In 2014, almost 40 percent of food workers were people of color (see Table 2). This is nearly 10 percentage points higher than private industry racial makeup as a whole.<sup>48</sup> The largest non-white segment were Latinos, who comprised 23 percent of the food chain. A little over 20 percent of food workers were born outside of the United States. In addition, close to eight percent of food chain workers were age 65 or older in 2014.<sup>49</sup> We expect that this trend will continue based on estimates by the U.S. Census that the population over 65 will double by the year 2050.

The food system is composed of an educated labor force. In 2014, over 37 percent of food chain workers had attained a high school degree, while over 30 percent also had some college education. An additional 12 percent of food workers held a bachelor's or graduate-level degree.

This pattern of diversity did not hold among food chain leadership. More than 72 percent of the chief executive officers in food industries were white men (see Figure 11), compared with cross-industry estimates that 62 percent of total private sector executives are white men. Fewer than 15 percent were white women. Latino men composed five percent of CEOs; Black men and Latina females comprised less than two percent. Other population groups, such as Black and Asian women as well as Natives of either gender, were one percent or less of food CEOs.

## RACIAL CATEGORIES

We used racial categories from the U.S. Census' definitions:

**WHITE** is White alone, not Hispanic.

**BLACK** is Black alone, not Hispanic.

**LATINO** is Hispanic alone.

**ASIAN** is Asian alone and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, not Hispanic.

**NATIVE** is American Indian and Alaskan Native, not Hispanic.

**OTHER** is Some Other Race and Two or More Races, not Hispanic.

White women were more represented in middle and upper management of food industries. They comprised more than 35 percent of professional and office workers, as well as a quarter of supervisors in food businesses. However, management was dominated by white men, who held 70 percent of all management positions, while another 17 percent of these positions were held by white women. Latino men comprised six percent of food managers, while other population groups were two percent or less.

Black men and Latina women have similar representation in middle and upper management, as well as in lower-level positions. Two percent of food CEOs and managers are Black men and Latina women; a slightly greater proportion, four percent and five percent respectively, hold supervisor positions. Eight percent of frontline workers were Black men, and nine percent were Latina women.

## 6) SIGNIFICANT WAGE GAPS BY GENDER AND RACE/ETHNICITY EXIST IN THE FOOD CHAIN

The patterns of inequality in the food system that keep women and people of color in frontline positions also produce significant wage gaps. For every dollar earned by white men, Latino men earned 76 cents and Black men 60 cents (see Figure 12). White women earned less than half of their white male counterparts at 47 cents to every dollar. Women of color faced both a racial and a gender penalty: Black and Latina women earned 42 and 45 cents, respectively, to every dollar paid to a white man. Within Asian communities, males earned 81 cents and females earned 58 cents for each dollar earned by white men. Native peoples, both men and women, suffered the larg-

TABLE 2

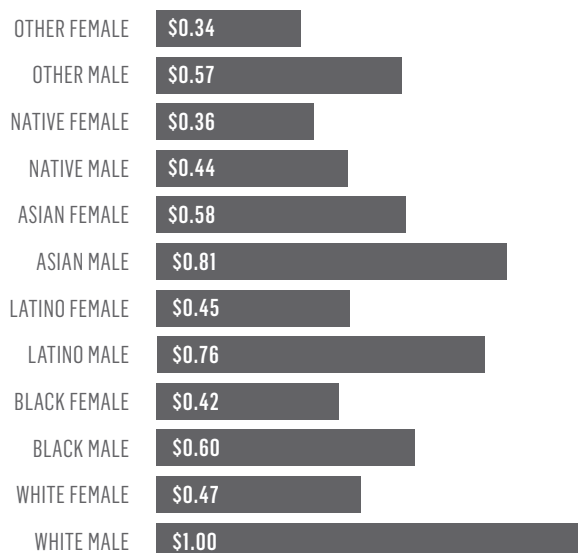
### DEMOGRAPHICS OF FOOD CHAIN WORKERS, 2014

GENDER	Male	14,110,924	66%
	Female	7,394,526	34%
AGE	16-24	3,972,172	18%
	25-44	8,182,279	38%
	45-64	7,694,221	36%
	65 or older	1,656,778	8%
RACE/ETHNICITY	Asian	840,521	4%
	Black	2,208,452	10%
	Latino	4,841,699	23%
	White	13,131,211	61%
	Native	134,700	0.6%
	Other	348,866	2%
PLACE OF BIRTH	U.S.	16,983,486	79%
	Latin America	3,153,330	15%
	Asia	816,391	4%
	Europe	347,068	2%
	Africa	137,084	0.6%
	Other	68,090	0.3%
NATIVITY	Citizen by birth	17,162,741	80%
	Foreign born	4,342,709	20%
EDUCATION	Less than high school	4,464,922	21%
	High school degree or equivalent	7,915,329	37%
	Some college	6,539,569	30%
	Bachelor's degree or higher	2,585,631	12%

Source: SRC analysis of American Community Survey (2014) and Occupational Employment Statistics (2015).

FIGURE 12

### 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).

est wage gap compared to white men, earning 44 and 36 cents respectively to every dollar.

The Census reported that households maintained by a foreign-born worker were among the lowest paid.<sup>50</sup> In addition, the Census found that Asian households overall enjoyed the highest median income, \$77,166, in 2015. For Asians employed in the food chain, however, wages for both men and women were below those earned by white men.

## 7) RATES OF INJURY AND ILLNESS AT WORK HAVE RISEN SINCE 2010

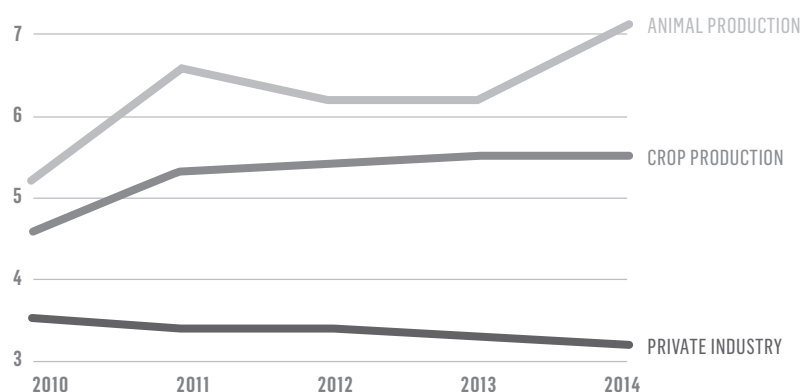
The official data on the job injuries recorded by the U.S. Health and Occupational Safety Administration (OSHA) reveal that food system workers are hurt or injured at higher rates than other workers. While the average rate of injuries for private industries was 3.2 cases per 100 workers in 2014, for agricultural and food manufacturing workers, these numbers jump to 5.5 and 5.1.<sup>51</sup>

Nonetheless, the standards OSHA uses for counting workplace injuries have been criticized as too narrow, leading to potentially serious problems of undercounting.<sup>52</sup> Direct surveys of workers indicate that the rates of injury can be much higher. For example, upwards of 72 percent of poultry workers in Alabama, 42 percent of food processing workers in New York City, and 57 percent of all food workers have reported suffering an injury or health problem on the job in these samples.<sup>53</sup>

Even with problems of undercounting, when we looked more closely at food chain industries with particularly high rates of injuries, like animal and crop production, we found that rates of injuries have risen since 2010, despite overall improvement across private industry (see Figure 13). Additionally, high injury rates are an example of how general improvement across the economy do not reach frontline food workers.

FIGURE 13

### RATE OF INJURIES PER 100 WORKERS, 2010-2014

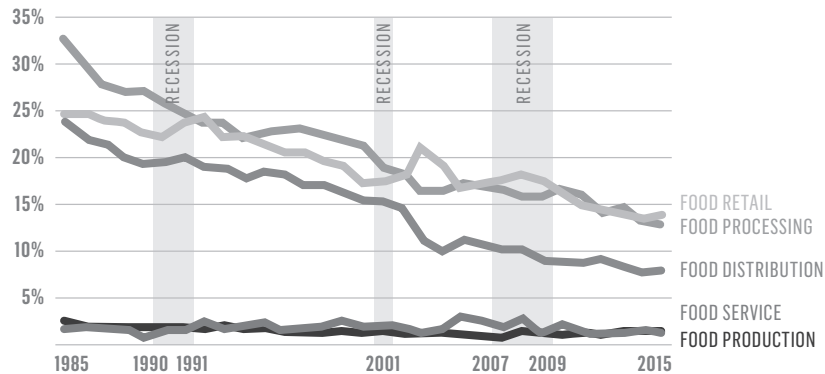


Source: SRC analysis of incidence rates of nonfatal occupational injuries and illnesses by industry, Occupational Health and Safety Administration (2010-2014).



FIGURE 14

## UNION DENSITY BY FOOD CHAIN SECTOR, 1985-2015



Source: SRC analysis of Current Population Survey (1985-2015) compiled by unionstats.com.

## 8) UNION MEMBERSHIP AND DENSITY HAVE DECLINED

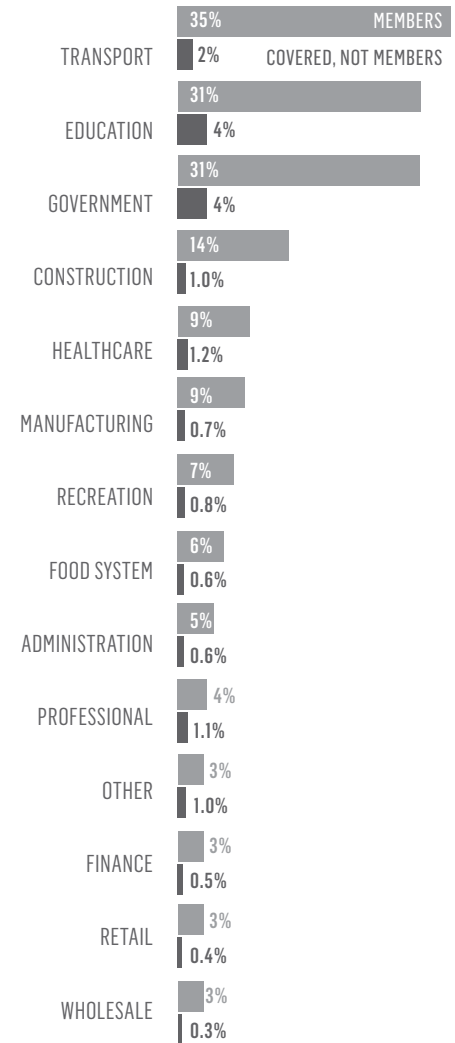
Unions help ensure higher wages and better conditions for workers. As with many sectors of the economy, there has been a dramatic decrease in unionization in the food system over the past 30 years. While food production and service have always had low union membership, the food processing, distribution, and retail sectors have seen large declines in union density over this time (see Figure 14).

Unions represented 16.4 million wage and salary workers in the U.S. in 2015.<sup>54</sup> This included 14.8 million members of trade unions as well as 1.6 million workers who were not affiliated with unions but held jobs that were covered by a union contract. The union membership rate across all industries in 2015 was 11 percent, almost half of the 18 percent membership rate in 1985. Food chain sectors had a lower union membership rate at six percent, or 1.1 million workers (see Figure 15). Almost seven percent, or 1.2 million workers, were covered by a union contract regardless of membership.

Food retail and processing enjoyed higher union density rates (see Figure 16). Almost 14 percent of retail workers in the food chain were members of a trade union, while another .8 percent were covered by a contract but not affiliated with a union. Processing workers included 12.7 percent union members and an additional 0.6 percent covered by a union contract. Distribution, service, and production had lower union density rates. About eight percent of distribution workers were union members, and another 0.8 percent had the protection of a union contract. Service and production employed less than two percent union members.

FIGURE 15

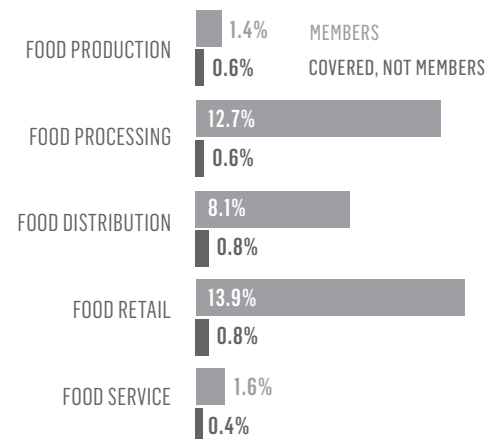
## UNION DENSITY BY INDUSTRY, 2015



Source: SRC analysis of Current Population Survey (2015) compiled by unionstats.com.

FIGURE 16

## UNION DENSITY BY FOOD CHAIN SECTOR, 2015



Source: SRC analysis of Current Population Survey (2015) compiled by unionstats.com.







### SECTION 3

## INTERVIEW FINDINGS

The previous section discussed the challenging national trends for workers in the food system: the lowest wages in the economy; significant pay gaps for women, immigrants, and people of color; and an expanding sector whose wages lag behind the rest of the economy. While this data charts the severity of the issues, it does not illustrate day-to-day life for workers in the food system. To better understand the realities of food work, we interviewed 20 workers representing each of the five sectors of the food system from 15 FCWA member organizations. Five of the interviewees work in distribution, three in processing, two in production, three in retail, and seven in service. Twelve of the interviewees are men, and eight are women. Of the 20 workers interviewed, 14 are immigrants, five of whom are also undocumented. Fifteen of the workers interviewed are between 30 and 40 years old, three are in their 20s, and two are 60 or older.

The results of the interviews are troubling. Every worker described significant challenges for frontline food workers. They detailed the realities of low wage work, described daily discrimination and abuse, violations of health and safety laws, and the problems that come with temporary employment practices. In addition, they shared stories about the myriad ways in which these conditions prevent them from living a good life—one in which they have a job where they are valued and treated with dignity, they are paid enough to support their family, and they are given enough time off to relax and spend quality time with loved ones.

Instead, stories of extreme personal struggle were common across interviews. From making so little money that they cannot afford to get decent healthcare for their children, to being insulted on a daily basis at work, workers we interviewed don't have access to a decent quality life and struggle to meet their basic needs. One service worker, who recently moved to New York City from China, explained how difficult it is for him to make friends when he works so many hours.

*I try to go out to get to know people, but it doesn't work because [I] don't speak English. [I] don't know anyone outside restaurant. And then [I] work a lot. [I] don't get a chance to meet people. Restaurant workers deserve a better life... To have a regular life, I mean. Like everybody.*

A production worker discussed the toll the job takes on the body and how difficult it is to handle additional medical expenses when pay is so low.

*Working in this industry, apart from the schedules, the exhaustion, all of that, your body is*

*weaker, and you are getting sick more frequently, so this affects you a lot because there isn't enough money to cover the medical bills.*

One of the workers in retail has a sick child who is in and out of the hospital. With no paid time off, she often has to make big sacrifices to be with him.

*There was this time [my son] got sick, it was around Christmas time. He got sick on the 20th, and I had to stay in the hospital with him on the 20th all the way to the 24th. So you can imagine that I didn't have any money to even spend on my kids for Christmas because I was at the hospital and I didn't get paid for those days.*

We also heard stories of solidarity, of action, and of hope. Workers proudly described how they stood up for their rights and fought back against oppressive conditions. As members of worker centers and unions, they organized to win worksite, policy, and legal victories. One of the service workers described both the difficult conditions in corporate dining and her work for over two years to organize a union. The hard work paid off—in September 2016, they finally won the campaign. Another worker in the processing sector legally challenged a company for the right to worker's compensation benefits for a serious injury and won. While the stories of working conditions in the food chain are often difficult to hear, they also show how workers are passionate about improving the industry for the better, for making the experience of food—from planting to consumption—more sustainable.

## **WAGES**

As described earlier in Section 2, food workers make the lowest wages in the economy. However, wages and the experiences around pay vary by sector and employer. Along with low pay, workers we spoke with chronicled challenges of understanding the complications of piece rate pay, only receiving small raises even after long tenures with companies, and the difficulty in addressing instances of wage theft.

Production workers earn a median hourly wage of \$11. Undocumented production workers make even less. Enrique currently earns \$9.60 per hour but has worked other jobs where he was paid below the minimum. Catalina worked harvesting oranges at a farm in Florida for over 10 years, making \$8.35 per hour. She shared her frustrations over the low pay with us. "You work so many hours in the sun, and it's so hot. Oh my god, I wish more people could spend a day in the sun and work like we work so that they feel whether or not \$8 per hour is what we deserve to do this work. And to do so much work."

While unionized meat processing plants generally have better pay and working conditions, as a trend, processing work for the frontline workforce comes with difficult conditions and low pay. The three non-union workers we spoke to in food processing plants made between \$9 and \$11.75 per hour for most of their careers, and all worked between nine and 12-hour shifts at a time. As Jose said about the pay, "\$11 per hour was very little to do a job where you are working with chemicals, you're working at night, you're working in very low temperatures." At the end of his employment at Taylor Farms, Jose was bumped from \$11 per hour



to \$14 per hour in large part, he believes, to dissuade him from continuing to organize with the Teamsters union. Sara, who worked at a catfish processing plant in Mississippi for many years, mentioned that when there were not any more fish to clean for a period of time, the company would require them to clock out and wait around for up to two hours, without pay, for another shipment to come in.

Pay for the distribution workers we interviewed—truck drivers and warehouse workers—varied based on whether they had a union or not, with \$20.10 per hour in California for a union truck driver and \$10 per hour at the bottom for a temporary warehouse worker in Illinois. Driving wages down in distribution is the ongoing and rising trend of paying workers by “performance,” illustrated in our interviews through the use of piece rate pay.<sup>55</sup> In the case of trucking, this means workers are paid for a combination of the weight of cargo or the number of units delivered, the number of stops, and the miles driven. Gustavo is a truck driver for Core-Mark, a publicly traded corporation that, among other things, distributes food products to grocery and convenience stores. The Core-Mark piece-rate is based on a complicated equation connected to the numbers of “cubes”—or units of packaged food the driver has to deliver—how many stops they make, and the miles driven. However, as Gustavo points out, “Honestly, it’s confusing... So, each truck has a certain amount of cubes, which sometimes does not make sense because, for example, some days they tell you ‘Oh, the truck has 600 cubes.’ You open your trailer, and your truck’s all the way to the back. It’s full... And then, another day, you have like 800 cubes, and you’re like, ‘Oh my God, it’s going to be even worse, right?’ So you open your door, and it’s half a trailer full.” Additionally, miles and stops are built into the equation in a way that often penalizes the worker.

In retail, pay rates vary widely between union and non-union workers and even within union shops, depending on the retail chain. The three workers we spoke with in retail were all from California. The non-union worker made \$9.75, whereas the two union workers we interviewed made \$12.88 and \$20.10. Wages for retail workers have not kept pace with inflation: for example, Lydia, who currently makes \$12.88 working for El Super, a discount grocery store, said, “We do have a union, and [the company doesn’t] want to give us anything right now [in contract negotiations]. We got a \$0.26 cents raise last year and that was the max, and then in five years they want to give us \$0.26 each year—that’s only \$1.30 in five years. Are you serious? Who survives off of that?” Further, management often intentionally miscounts or shortchanges worker’s paychecks. “They get away with it if you’re not paying attention,” said Reyna.

The service workers we spoke with made some of the lowest wages of all workers interviewed, confirming our findings in Section 2. Undocumented service workers are often paid below the minimum wage, with employers relying on fear to deny them legal protection. The highest paid service worker made \$16.85 per hour at an Intel cafeteria in Silicon Valley, but her pay had risen after she and her co-workers began an organizing campaign with the union UNITE HERE. Two of the workers we spoke with earned minimum wage—one at \$7.25 per hour in Mississippi (this is the federal minimum wage) and another at \$9 per hour in NYC. And on the extremely low end of the service wages, we heard from two undocumented workers who made \$3.50 per hour. Through an organizing campaign with the Laundry Workers Center



Photo: Food Chain Workers Alliance



United, they were able to win a raise to \$9 per hour, or NYC's minimum wage.

Across all five sectors, we heard tales of wage theft, the failure of employers to pay workers what they earned. Two of the service workers we spoke to receive the tipped minimum wage and shared stories of low or stolen tips. Others detailed not being paid for hours worked. We heard that sometimes there are different pay rates for different departments in retail stores so workers need to scrutinize their checks to ensure they are paid correctly. Stories like these were common in our interviews with distribution and processing workers as well. For farmworkers, who have fewer legal protections and for whom fear about legal status is often used by employers to intimidate them, wage theft is even more common. Enrique, who works in a dairy farm and has friends in farms across the northeast, told us about common wage theft issues. "There are ranches where when you start, they hold your pay and say they are going to pay you when you are done with the job, but many times they don't pay you at the end of the job."

## **DISCRIMINATION & ABUSE**

The problems of low wages and wage theft only partially capture the issues that many food workers face. All of the workers we interviewed cited routine incidents of unfair treatment, including discrimination and harassment on the basis of race, gender, and immigration status. Moreover, many of those interviewed had stories of managers treating them with disregard and disrespect. The immigrant workers we spoke with, in particular, talked about how discrimination often included threats of deportation to keep them from speaking out about poor conditions and illegal activity, such as not following minimum wage laws or safety regulations.

Jiang, a sushi chef in a restaurant in Massachusetts, details the discriminatory practices at his workplace, emphasizing that depending on what race or ethnicity the owner is, they will scapegoat or discriminate against workers of a different race. This is especially true if the workers are undocumented or vulnerable. Most of the discrimination he sees is targeted at Latino workers. "Latino workers don't make the same money even though they do the same job."

Tiofilo and Jorge, two dishwashers in a New York City restaurant confirmed this sentiment, emphasizing that much of

the discrimination they face is based on their immigration status. "They may hire us, but because we're immigrants, we're going to suffer the worst of anyone in the restaurant." This kind of abuse takes a toll. Tiofilo said he can stand the physical difficulties of the job, but the "psychological impact, you know, [of] always being treated that way" is difficult to withstand day in and day out.

Many workers discussed being scolded, humiliated, verbally reprimanded, or being given a write-up in front of customers and having to proceed as if nothing happened. Lydia, a grocery store cashier, said, "The managers have no respect, they really don't... even when [the manager] wants to give someone a write-up, he'll take it to your register instead of calling you inside the office."

Such treatment can include customer abuse, which can create an overall climate of worker harassment. Shanita, a former server in New York City, described the expectation that workers would ignore discrimination and sexual harassment by customers and that management would not intervene:

*I've had a lot of sexual harassment issues with work... This older guy, he came to the restaurant all the time. He always would say things... I poured him his coffee. He was like, 'Hey, little Black girl, you got enough milk in those jugs for my coffee?' I was like, 'What!?' And I looked straight to my boss, so [my boss] is like, 'Oh, don't worry about it, you know he's a regular.'*

Tagela, who worked at a McDonald's in Mississippi, said, "People are disrespectful. When you work at nights, you have to deal with so many drunk, rude people. And you can't say anything to defend yourself." In fact, she was written up for it.

For some workers, this negative treatment can even come from government officials. Mohammed, a street vendor in New York City, talked about facing discrimination as an Arab American, not just from customers but also from other business owners and police officers. "The police department, they always bother us... They harass people because they think we are garbage people, uneducated people... [They] give you like four or five tickets. And they keep using words, very bad words to you, racist words, like 'f-ing immigrant.'"

Inside the workplace, immigrants, already living on the margins, are often further exploited because employers count on their fear of seeking legal protection. Catalina, a farmworker, recalled conditions at a tomato farm. "The way they treated you, it was as if you were an animal. They didn't treat you like a human being... We lived in trailers, like 20 or 30 people in a trailer. They punished us if we missed any work, treated us like we were slaves." Discrimination along these lines, compounded with difficult work and unreasonable expectations, produces a culture of harassment where terrible treatment of workers becomes the norm for the industry.

Another form of abuse we found across interviews was by managers and company leaders looking for new ways to put pressure on workers, pitting them against one another and themselves. The business model in many of these companies is reliant on optimizing productivity, and so pushing workers to produce more with less is part of the culture. Fabiana, who worked in a poultry processing plant, talked in detail about needing to work so fast that she couldn't even look to the side for one second, since the machines were constantly sending more chickens down and if she slowed the process down, she would be yelled at. "They always



Photo: Organization United for Respect

pressure people to work faster and faster, and they are always there with us checking to see that we're not stopping," she told us.

Those with unions reported much better conditions overall and much less blatant discrimination or abuse. However, they also reported management retaliation for union activity such as changing schedules, cutting hours, maintaining hours just below full-time status to avoid paying benefits, denying days off, and even moving people between store locations or job functions.

## UNSTABLE AND TEMPORARY WORK

The entire food industry, like all sectors of the economy, is increasingly structured so that companies have "hyper-flexibility" across all areas of their work.<sup>56</sup> Rather than hire workers as permanent employees, companies instead hire workers through contractors, temp agencies, and staffing agencies.<sup>57</sup> These strategies allow companies to avoid paying higher wages and to evade legal responsibility for providing health insurance and other work benefits to the employees. For distribution workers in particular, the hiring of labor through third party logistics providers results in a competitive landscape in which agencies exist in a fluid market that puts strong downward pressures on wages.<sup>58</sup>

While this flexibility might help companies save money, the effects on workers include lower pay, unpredictable schedules and hours, fewer benefits, little job security, and very few opportunities for advancement.<sup>59</sup> Nationally, temporary workers earn 22 percent less than all private-sector workers.<sup>60</sup> Turning to temporary workers is a growing trend in the food system,



in farms and warehouses, food processing plants, distribution companies, and even fast food restaurants and food service establishments. This dependence on cheap, contingent workers effectively creates a low-wage marginalized workforce that can find no possibility of career advancement. Across interviews, we heard stories about how these trends hurt workers.

These practices are increasingly common for food processing facilities, which are following the model of the use of farm labor contractors in agriculture. An example of this can be found at two Taylor Farms plants in Tracy, California. About 900 workers, mostly Latino, work in the two facilities, with about half of the workers employed through two temporary staffing agencies: Slingshot and Abel Mendoza. As Doug Bloch, political director of the Teamsters Joint Council No. 7 puts it, some of these “temporary” employees have been working at Taylor Farms for up to 14 years, most are paid the minimum wage, and on average the workers in Tracy earn \$3 per hour less than workers in the same job classifications at a unionized plant in Salinas, California owned by the same company.

Two workers we interviewed were hired by temp agencies, and three other workers mentioned working for temp or staffing agencies in the past. One of the distribution workers, Bakari, was currently unemployed as he was let go after his most recent three-month temp period ended. He was let go for what he thought were arbitrary reasons, which is a pattern among long-term temp workers. Steven went from a temporary agency to one staffing agency and then to another one when California (Cal) Cartage changed agencies to cut costs even further. At Cal Cartage at the Port of Los Angeles, only about 15 percent of the entire warehouse workforce is hired directly by the company.

The situation that Bakari and Steven face illustrates the problems of temporary employment. They do not have access to health insurance, do not get paid sick days, have no job security, and have either experienced wage theft, or know others in their situation who have. Unlike the permanent workers in the warehouse where he works, Bakari has no access to worker’s compensation insurance or basic legal protection directly from the company. Steven has some protections because of AB1897, a California law that holds a contracting company liable for the wages, payment of tax withholdings, and purchase of valid workers’ compensation insurance by its labor supplier. Taylor Farms workers and Cal Cartage workers were among many who lobbied in support of AB1897.

As Bakari described his experiences and those of his co-workers, temp workers are often asked to perform tasks that the companies wouldn’t ask of their permanent workforce, without any of the protections. “They don’t have an insurance policy for temp workers, so you got to really be on your feet. And you just got to pay attention, so you don’t get hurt.”

Temp workers often face intense pressure to produce for fear of losing the job or not being in the running for a more permanent position. As Bakari told us of his most recent warehouse job, “I wanted to be hired on through the company directly, and like my 89th day, when they had to hire me the



next day, they ended my assignment. I deserve these jobs, too, you know? Deserve to make an honest living. I'm trying, and it's like it's just a revolving door." Bakari relies on food stamps and free public health clinics for food and healthcare and struggles to pay his bills. "We just want steady jobs. It's hard to keep having to go through these temp services just to get a job to pay your bills, because when your assignment ends, your bills don't stop."

## UNPREDICTABLE SCHEDULES AND DIFFICULT HOURS

Unpredictable scheduling with too few hours or long shifts with no flexibility to cut hours left the workers we interviewed feeling that they lack agency and control over their lives. About half of the workers we interviewed told us about their schedules being kept just below full-time in order for companies to avoid offering them benefits. The other half talked about needing to work so many hours that they had no time for anything else. Lydia shared that in response to requests from workers for more hours, management "always has an excuse. They say that the business is slow, and they can't. But they just don't want to do it."

In addition to not getting enough hours, workers with erratic schedules have trouble keeping a second job because they can't predict when they will be available. This is a problem because they are often not making quite enough to get by and become trapped in a cycle of poverty. A few of the workers we interviewed mentioned scheduling changes made in retaliation after workers did something management didn't like or even after they called in sick. Reyna, who works at Albertson's, told us how the schedule at her workplace is based on favoritism.



Photo: Organization United for Respect

Many workers we interviewed shared that it is routine for them to work long hours and to not receive the breaks and recovery time that they are entitled to. Processing plant workers are required to work long shifts, often overnight, with some split shifts, and few breaks. Fabiana, who works in a poultry processing plant, has one 20-minute break over her nine-hour shift. Sometimes she has to spend 10 of those minutes waiting in line for the bathroom. “We get a break of 20 minutes at mid-day and eat quickly. Then we return to the line and do the same work for the rest of the day.”

Service workers routinely work double shifts (i.e. two shifts worked back to back) or over 40 hours per week without receiving overtime pay. As Shanita explained, “The last place where I worked, there were only five or six waitresses, so I was working four to five doubles a week... On your feet, from 10 a.m. till 10:00 p.m., it's brutal.”

Production workers we interviewed work 9-10 hour shifts in the fields. As Catalina shared about her hours, “They give you 55 hours, but they don't pay you overtime. We work 10 hours Monday through Friday and five hours on Saturday.” Enrique and his family work at a dairy farm and wake up in the middle of the night and work for five to six hours, take a short break, and then go back to work for another five hours. He told us that exhaustion and long-term sleep deprivation are “the ugliest experiences [he has] endured in the milk industry.”

A couple of the workers we spoke to talked about the problems with seasonal work. Depending on the season, their hours are either long and intense, or, during slow seasons, not enough to meet their needs for pay. Daniel, a truck driver who delivers food to public schools, told us, “I do work another job during the summer season because I don't have enough seniority yet... I work through a trucking agency, mostly it's just transferring trailers.”

## UNSAFE AND DANGEROUS WORKING CONDITIONS

Given national concerns around food safety, we might expect that the workers who handle our food supply would do so in healthy and safe working conditions. But as our data analysis on OSHA violations in previous sections show, the reality is that food workers have rates of injury much higher than national averages.

All of the workers we interviewed had either been hurt on the job themselves or had a close co-worker who had been hurt. Very often, these injuries are not treated seriously by management. For instance, one of the workers from a processing plant recalls a time when his sister told management that she hurt her foot on one of the machines. “She called them over, and they said, ‘You're fine. It's nothing.’ And she told them, ‘No, my foot hurts, and I want to call someone.’” They wanted her to see the company doctor, the same one who treats everyone and who tells everyone, “‘Oh no, you're fine. Take this pill, and that'll get rid of the pain, and tomorrow you can return to work.’”

All of the workers in production and processing we spoke with referenced being told to see a “company doctor” when they've been sick or injured. These doctors are familiar with the working conditions at the farm or plant and are paid by the company. They usually clear



Photo: Earl Dotter



workers to go back to work quickly and never tell them about the long-term risks involved in their work.<sup>61</sup>

Many of our interviews included stories about workplace accidents because of work with dangerous chemicals, machinery, or other equipment that was not serviced properly, and even due to poor lighting conditions that make it difficult for workers to see. In the poultry plant where Fabiana worked for 13 years, they breathed in chlorine and acid used to clean the chicken throughout the day. The smells from these chemicals permeate the building, and spills are not uncommon. After a particularly bad chemical spill last year, Fabiana developed chronic asthma. When she consulted a doctor, they told her that the condition was from the temperatures and the exposure to chemicals at work and that she must stop working at the plant.

Since they work with sharp knives and machines to clean the fish, Sara detailed that in seafood processing work, it is not uncommon for uniforms to get stuck in the cutting machines and for people to be severely hurt. She has seen co-workers lose large patches of skin and even fingers. They also work with extremely hot water to clean the fish, and Sara was once scalded, resulting in second- and third-degree burns on her foot.

The warehouse workers told us about forklifts that weren't maintained. "Out of all the [20 to 30] forklifts in each department, there might be five or 10 of them that work properly." Making this situation even worse is the low light levels in many warehouses. As Bakari put it, "It is really dark in there because they won't invest in good lighting. You are always squinting, and it is so hard to see what's right in front of you."

The temperatures in stores, warehouses, and plants are usually extreme—very cold or very hot. Warehouse workers in particular suffer from high heat. As Bakari told us, "You got to stay hydrated and try not to catch heat stroke when you're working in that warehouse when it's hot like that. So that's a risk in itself, you know?" In the most egregious examples, the heat can result in death. Bakari remembers a female co-worker who had a heart attack on her way home. On the other end of the scale, the temperature inside processing plants is kept very cold. Jose told us that it isn't just the exposure to the low temperatures (55 degrees Fahrenheit and below) that



Photo: John D. Simmons

is so difficult, but also switching between hot and cold. “You have to be going outside and inside, and then it’s 38 degrees to, I don’t know how hot, 90-something degrees. So one gets sick frequently as well.”

Many plants and farms are set up with workers in one position, doing one task most of the day, using the same set of muscles. Sara and Fabiana, who worked in the catfish and poultry processing plants respectively, told us that they all had to work on the fish or chicken at a table or assembly line of the same size, despite differences in arm length and height. Along with carpal tunnel and tendonitis, conditions common in processing work, this can lead to other serious physical injuries and conditions, like chronic back and arm pain.<sup>62</sup>

For drivers or other workers completing tasks that, if done too quickly, can be dangerous, the pressure to perform quickly creates safety hazards. As Gustavo emphasized, “The faster you work, the faster you get out. Technically, you make more money the fewer hours you work, and your average hourly rate goes up, which is just setting your wage, right? So right now, we are speeding. You know, doing U-turns here and there, crossing double yellow lines.”

In a few of the interviews, we heard about managers directly asking workers to do things that are unsafe, illegal, and for which the consequence would be borne by the worker. For instance, Gustavo, a truck driver, was asked to do an additional stop even though it would put him over 12 hours of driving, the legal number of hours he could be on the road. When he told his boss he could only do one of the two final stops, his boss suggested that Gustavo clock out but still do the final stop. Gustavo ultimately refused but told us that he knows many other drivers in his place would have gone through with it, out of fear of losing their jobs, even though their driver’s license could be revoked.

Despite all of these hazardous working conditions, workers interviewed shared that quite often employers did not offer basic health and safety trainings, or even follow all regulations. Enrique explained that milking the cows at large dairy farms is a dangerous job. Still, many undocumented workers are doing this job—along with others like it—with no health insurance, sick days, or access to worker’s compensation. Enrique and his parents handle chlorine, acids, and heavy-duty soaps to clean the machines. They were never provided with basic training on working safely with these chemicals or the machines.

Catalina recalls the health and safety conditions at a tomato farm. “I think that was the most cruel experience and the toughest that I’ve experienced in my life... they had you go harvest when they were fumigating and my head hurt a lot. And I started to bleed from my nose... There they gave you nothing. No type of service, none, nor water, nor anything. Nor was there a bathroom.”

When issues were brought to the attention of their employers, interviewees explained, concerns were not taken seriously. “I’ve seen people get injured in these warehouses, and they kind of get swept under the rug, you know?” Bakari said.

Even though health and safety regulations exist, management often attempts to avoid compliance in order to cut costs or save time. That is, unless an accident occurs or there is an inspection. For instance, Jose said, “Any time there is an OSHA inspection, they have fewer



Photo: Farmworker Association of Florida



workers there that day and take many of the materials out of the main shop floor. This is because, normally, they have so many machines and tools needed for the job that you can hardly walk.” They also asked Jose and his crew to wash many of the machines and garbage bins before inspections—something that should happen routinely but did not.

Nahima described not being able to take a bathroom break because she couldn’t find someone to cover her station for a few minutes. She told OSHA about this when they came in. “Now they are making sure I take my 10-minute break.”

Similarly, Salomon described Walmart’s tendency to conduct safety trainings or institute policies only after the fact. “You know, sometimes it happens that they do the training after an accident happens. The buffer machines operate with propane. So in order to handle the propane tanks and connect it to the machine, according to the training, we should wear leather gloves. But nobody told us! You know? Nobody told us about it. So it happened that one worker tried to change the propane tank, and it leaked, and she got burned.”

Required safety equipment to do a job, from skid-resistant shoes to work gloves, is often not provided. Jorge, a dishwasher in the restaurant industry, fell down the stairs to the basement because of “greasy conditions” and a lack of safety tape or a handrail. Only after the Laundry Workers Center United intervened did the restaurant install a handrail.

In addition to the health and safety conditions for employees, workers also chronicled a number of issues that could impact consumers. For instance, Fabiana explained that in her plant, pieces of chicken frequently fall on the floor because someone drops them or because the line was moving so fast or a machine malfunctioned. She said when that happens, they are instructed to pick it up, dust it off, and send it down the line to be packaged and sent out.



Photo: Daphne Doerr Photography

## PERSONAL HEALTH AND SICKNESS

While many of the workers we interviewed told us about getting sick more often because of their jobs, they don’t have any support from the same jobs to ensure that they can take time off to take care of themselves and stay healthy. While the Teamsters helped the workers in Jose’s plant get paid sick days, many processing plant workers do not have the same.

In addition to negligence around basic health and safety,

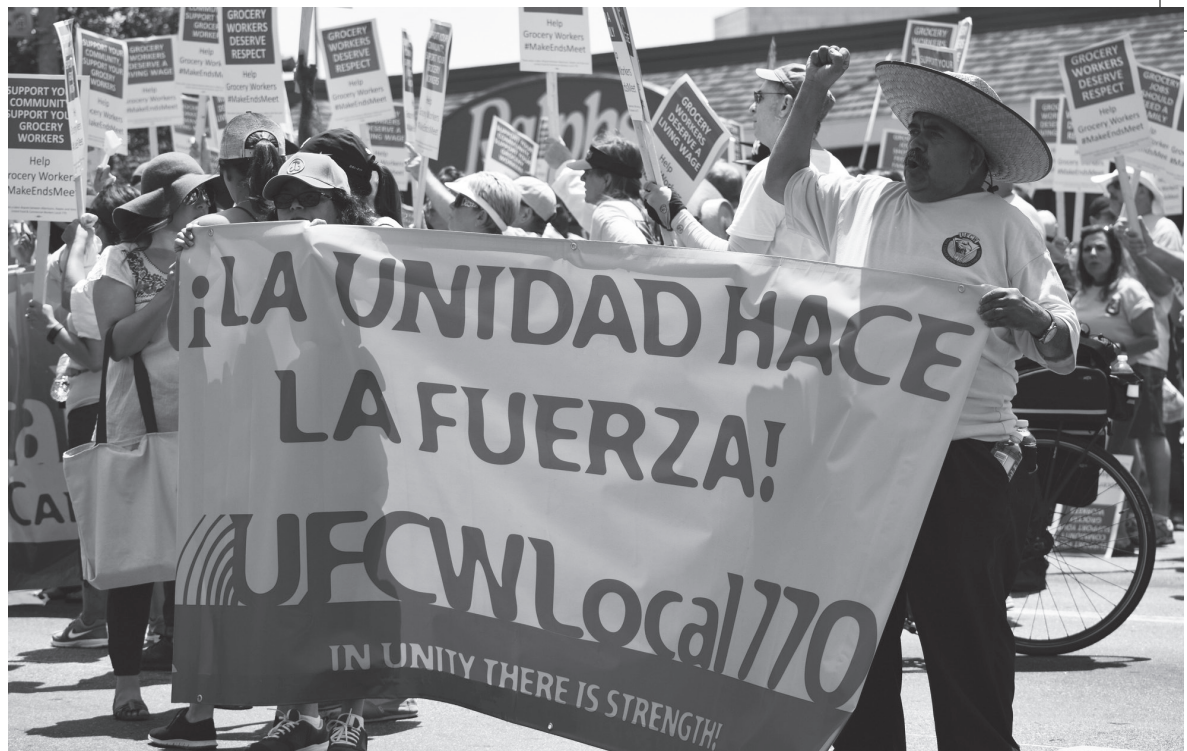


Photo: UFCW Local 770

few workers are given paid time off for sick days and end up working sick. Or, even when they do take time off, they are punished for absences with larger workloads, so many report not adequately taking care of their health needs in order to avoid additional stress at work. Fabiana told us about the poultry plant's approach to sick days. "Sometimes one has to go to work sick because they do not give you sick days. If you call in sick, you get a half point, and if you do not call, you get three points. At 13 points, you get fired. At times, I had to go to work with a fever."

Some workers have paid sick days after organizing efforts or recent legislation; others, who are employed informally, do not. Because pay is tied to the hours worked, many workers opt to work while sick, even if it is additionally unsafe while handling food. Tagela told us, "Yeah, I work when I'm sick. It's go in or not get paid. And especially when you have other mouths to feed, you have to go in. You don't have no other choice but to go in and get paid for that day. If not, then your check is short."

In addition, many workers don't have health insurance and can't get the quality care they need when they are sick.

## ORGANIZING

The interviews show that across the board food workers face a variety of serious challenges. However, all the interviewees shared another quality in common—they are all members of organizations that are fighting for better conditions, wages, and treatment at their jobs. Some of the workers are members of formal labor unions, such as the International Brotherhood of Teamsters or the United Food and Commercial Workers Union. Others are members of worker centers such as the Laundry Workers Center United and the Mississippi Workers Center for Human Rights. Regardless of their organizational affiliation, when workers organize together, real change can happen.

CATALINA joined the Farmworker Association of Florida (FWAF) because she heard organizers speaking out against the unfair treatment of farmworkers at community events. FWAF's work is focused on building "power among farmworker and rural low-income communities to respond to and gain control over the social, political, workplace, economic, health, and environmental justice issues that impact their lives." Catalina acknowledges that they face many struggles, and the path may be long, but it's important to her to be in community and solidarity with others as she continues to speak out against injustice.

ENRIQUE joined Migrant Justice to help address common injustices, like wage theft and repeated injuries, that he, his family, and friends continuously faced. He started working with Migrant Justice by conducting worker-to-worker surveys about conditions on dairy farms. Out of these surveys Enrique and farmworker leaders began developing the "Milk with Dignity Code of Conduct" in which, as Enrique described it "farmworkers define the human rights essential to a dignified workplace and fair housing." After months of ongoing community dialogue and education, Enrique helped lead Migrant Justice to the doorstep of Ben & Jerry's, publicly pressuring them to "respect the human rights of farmworkers in their dairy supply chain by joining the Milk with Dignity Program." The campaign was victorious—and the program details are currently being negotiated. Enrique sees this as "just the beginning."

FABIANA, who had to leave her job in poultry processing because of health problems as a result of long-term exposure to cold temperatures and chemicals, said, "Together we are many, so that the companies see that we are not alone, that we are supported." She sought out the help of the Northwest Arkansas Workers Justice Center after the chemical spill that left her with ongoing respiratory issues. They connected her with a doctor outside of the company as well as legal help. Eventually, they got the plant to pay for her medical expenses and six months of pay. For Fabiana, though, this is not enough since she may have trouble working again; the case is still in court. She continues to work closely with the worker center and connect other friends and co-workers to the organization, believing in strength in numbers and that together she and the other workers are more powerful than alone.

SARA worked to organize her catfish plant and is currently helping the Mississippi Workers Center for Human Rights (MWCHR) on a number of their campaigns. As she told us, "The Workers Center helped me a lot because, you know, it made me understand that just because we're working those jobs doesn't mean we don't have human rights... And once we learned that, we realized that they couldn't treat us like that." Sara sees worker-to-worker education as one of the most important roles she plays. She explains, "We have to dismantle in workers' minds" the idea that they are in debt to the boss: "He gave us jobs! That don't mean he's supposed to harass you... He's still supposed to respect you as a woman, as a human being." She sees the work of MWCHR as part of a bigger strategy to improve working conditions, especially in the south and in a state like Mississippi.



Photo: Annie Barrett

DANIEL, a member of the Teamsters union Local 63 and a shop steward, helped organize his fellow drivers at a food distribution company over a year ago. Since then, they've seen huge wins in pay and a real change in tone at the workplace. "I've noticed a lot of the drivers now, they're not really walking around scared. Now they stand up for themselves, they feel like they have a voice, and they do." When we asked Daniel why he stepped up to organize the union, he said he was unhappy with his hours, with his delivery assignment, with pay, with everything. "I was pretty much fed up, and when I was approached, I said 'yes.'" He added that after winning the union, the camaraderie and sense of mutual respect and leadership that he and his co-workers now feel is one of the main reasons he is happier at work.

STEVEN organizes with the Warehouse Worker Resource Center (WWRC) on its long-term campaign to fight for basic rights for the workers at Cal Cartage warehouse company. He listed the many wins he's seen while at the warehouse, attributing them to the work of WWRC: more health and safety measures followed; compliance with the requirement that workers are paid for their time at the warehouse if they are called in, even when there is no work; tougher oversight on paychecks to address wage theft issues. In addition, WWRC and Steven are fighting for compliance with the City of Los Angeles' living wage ordinance, demanding that Cal Cartage hire more of the workers directly, and fighting back when workers are unjustly terminated. Steven told us that he is organizing with WWRC because he saw what good and committed work they were doing and wanted to do his part. "They've been working on these issues for over two years. Constantly. Not part-time, not like every few weeks. No, every day. Every day it's been a constant battle... and we're not done fighting."







SALOMON organizes with OUR Walmart, an organization of Walmart employees fighting for fair treatment and better working conditions. At his worksite, they delivered a petition that successfully had faulty equipment removed from their store. When we asked him about why he is motivated to organize, he said, "Without it, before, I just felt like I had no voice. My opinion didn't count, and I felt powerless to change things... I had told management [about the equipment problems] before... just by myself, and they didn't hear me. But when they saw a lot of signatures, and they saw that the organization was involved, they stopped." Salomon's sentiment speaks to the power of direct collective action that workers with organizations like OUR Walmart use to win positive change, tactics that are particularly important in retail chains hostile to unions, such as Walmart.

TIOFILO and JORGE are involved with the Laundry Workers Center United. The Center organized a successful campaign to target a restaurant owner and investors who paid below minimum wage. "Even if you don't have [immigration] documents, you have the right to receive minimum wage, you have right to work with dignity, and basically [the Center convinced me] to be part of the campaign," said Jorge. After the campaign, Jorge and Tiofilo went from being paid \$3.50 per hour to \$9 per hour, and through direct confrontations with the management in their restaurant, they also demanded basic respect. "The campaign opened my world because I got a lot of experience organizing and we won a lot," Jorge told us. "Like right now, the company is paying minimum wage, the company is paying overtime, they're going to pay sick days."

For many workers, organizations are not just helping them win pay increases or other benefits, but are supporting them in leadership development, education, and entrepreneurial endeavors. The Street Vendor Project offers new vendors support in navigating the entire landscape. "If you want to start this job, you go to the health department," explained MOHAMMED. "They give you a class for two days, to teach you how to sell food and the health and safety regulations. But they never teach you how to be in the streets, what your rights are, how to pick your spot. That's what the Street Vendor Project does."

SHANITA told us that not only is ROC United supporting her to start her own catering business, a worker-owned cooperative, but she also credits the organization with helping her achieve other "personal victories," including speaking about the conditions in service work at public events, writing letters to the editor of newspapers, and building up her sense of her own capabilities. "It's been a long time coming... I mean, my closest friends and family, they're like, 'You can cook. What are you doing still working for someone?'"

These stories represent just a few of the long-term FCWA member campaigns to make positive change in workplaces across the food chain. When asked about organizing, the workers we interviewed first talked about their desire to win basic respect and dignity at work, for themselves and their co-workers. They then spoke about their need for a living wage and decent benefits—for access to a good life. Every worker interviewed mentioned the power of the many and of the collective, of workers united together to fight for access to good work and good food—for themselves, their children and families, and the generations that will come after them.

# WORKER PROFILES

## SECTION 4



**ENRIQUE "KIKÉ"**  
(pronounced KE E-kay)  
**Migrant Justice**  
**Production**

Enrique is 23 years old and was born in the southeast of Mexico, in Tabasco, and now is a farmworker leader and organizer with Migrant Justice. When Enrique was 11 years old, his father and later his mother were forced to migrate to the United States in order to look for work, leaving him and his sibling to be raised by his grandparents and extended family. Many members of their sending community had migrated to Vermont. Kiké's parents began working 65-hour weeks, waking up in the middle of the night, handling dangerous cleaning chemicals, like chlorine and acid, and working with large, dangerous animals and machinery.

When Enrique was a teenager, he migrated to the US as well and joined his father in the Vermont dairy industry. Enrique was immediately struck by how tired and worn down his father was and soon began to understand. Kiké's first job paid less than federal minimum wage and had no days off, and he worked upwards of 70 hours per week. He was alone, isolated, and depressed and couldn't even visit his father and other relatives that were working in Vermont.

He eventually found work on the farm with his father and soon after received a visit from one of Migrant Justice's organizers inviting him to a "farmworker community assembly" where workers gather over food to discuss shared problems and envision solutions. Enrique felt at home at that first assembly and began dedicating his seldom-free time to participate in Migrant Justice's successful statewide campaign to win access to driver's licenses regardless of immigration status. Migrant Justice created family and community for Kiké, and he soon began connecting with more and more workers, including many that he went to school with back in Mexico.

But still the reality of work was daunting. Enrique's father fell and injured his leg because, as Enrique told it, the floor "was very slippery" because "there's milk falling, there's water falling constantly while you're working." As a dairy worker, Enrique also saw how work opportunities and advancement are denied to him and his peers and those that typically do the most difficult work.

This is combined with a culture of fear, where employers threaten to call immigration authorities when workers speak out. Working in Vermont, the atmosphere is especially anxiety-inducing because they are near a militarized border.

When Enrique went to that first Migrant Justice meeting, he realized that he and his family were not alone. "As I listened to the stories of other workers, [I] realized that they were very similar to mine and that there was this exploitation at work and no benefits. [I saw] how what had happened to my family and me also was also happening to others."

This was the moment that Enrique "decided to support the group more, learn how to be organized to defend [my] rights, and look for a collective solution." After volunteering his free time as one of the leaders of Migrant Justice's successful driver's license campaign, Enrique was "really inspired that working together the community could do great things." He soon joined the Migrant Justice's main leadership body, "the Farmworker Coordinating Committee," and dedicated more and more of his time to conduct outreach to his community, raising awareness about access to driver's licenses, and helping to lay the foundation for Migrant Justice's Milk with Dignity campaign by conducting worker to worker surveys about workplace conditions on dairy farms.

Enrique then joined the staff of Migrant Justice and began to deepen his skills as an organizer and had the opportunity to share experiences and skills with worker-leaders of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers in Florida. Enrique got an intimate look inside the changes that the Fair Food Program drive and the strategies behind the campaign and program in which corporations are held responsible for the downward pressure on worker's wages in supply chains. Enrique keeps his eyes on the big picture now, sharing that his work is to build a movement to "change the dynamics of power, so that the workers who know the industry best define the problems and put forth the solutions." This is the heart of Migrant Justice's Milk with Dignity Program—a Worker-Driven Social Responsibility (WSR) initiative modeled after and inspired by the Fair Food Program.



Photo: International Brotherhood of Teamsters

**JOSÉ VEGA**  
**Teamsters Local 601,**  
**Joint Council 7**  
**Processing**

José Vega was born in Guadalajara, Mexico and moved to the U.S. in 2002 when he was 15 years old. He worked various part-time jobs until 2009 when he found a full-time job in a Taylor Farms processing plant in Tracy, California. Taylor Farms is the nation's largest supplier of cut fruits and salads. For the seven years he spent at the plant, Jose worked long hours with dangerous chemicals, saw many of his friends and co-workers get sick and injured, and was asked to do things he was uncomfortable with, like moving machinery and equipment before inspections by the Occupational Health and Safety Administration in order for the company to avoid fines. Jose also witnessed management using a culture of fear, intimidation, and harassment, including sexual harassment, to make workers feel unsafe and constantly at risk of losing their jobs.

In the sanitation department, where Jose started out, they worked 10 to 12-hour shifts overnight. He and his co-workers were frequently ill from exposure to extreme temperatures and chemicals. Machines overcrowded the shop floor, and health and safety training was non-existent, leading to frequent accidents. "There was this kid who mixed the [wrong] chemicals by accident... the reaction is a gas. You breathe it in. It affects your entire respiratory system." Despite suffering injuries, workers like Jose's friend would not file for worker's compensation benefits for fear of being fired.

Eventually José was promoted to crew leader and started working the day shift on the processing line, but health and safety conditions did not improve. There were recurring instances of physical abuse, sexual harassment, and negli-

gence. Jose's sister still works at the plant, and he is especially concerned for her health and safety. Wages remain stagnant. Yet, some positive changes have come with the help of the Teamsters union organizing campaign.

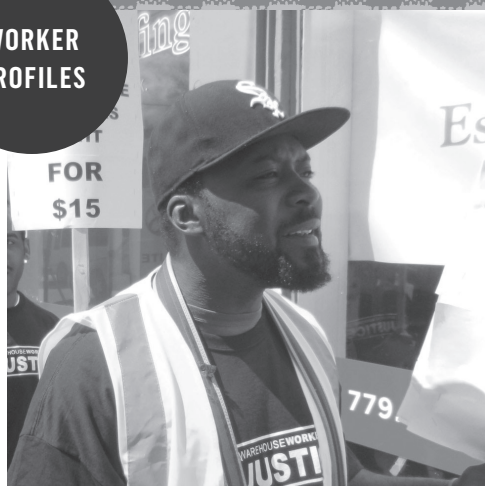
As Jose recalls, "Until the Teamsters arrived in 2014, many people were there for 10 years earning the minimum wage. [Then] the plant gave everyone an increase of 50 cents," which Jose attributes to the campaign—"it was a win." Additionally, as management recognized that Jose might step up into a leadership position with the union, he was given a raise of \$3 an hour.

Along with raises in pay, there have been other victories, such as gaining holiday and sick pay and access to filtered drinking water. Still, problems such as wage theft persist, and workers who are involved in efforts to organize face threats and retaliation. Unfortunately, just last year, after seven years with the company, José was fired. While management made a case for a legal firing, Jose knew it was because of union activity, as he had become increasingly active with the campaign.

Jose is now an organizer with the Teamsters. The workers at Taylor Farms do not have a contract yet, but Jose is hopeful. "All the people there are there out of necessity... The reason I got involved was to fight to obtain a better workplace and a better work environment and to improve the benefits for all of the workers and to be fair with everyone."

## WORKER PROFILES

Photo: Warehouse Workers for Justice



### **BAKARI WHITFIELD** **Warehouse Workers** **for Justice** **Distribution**

Bakari Whitfield was born and raised in Joliet, Illinois where he works in the warehouse industry. Bakari made \$10 per hour at his last warehouse job and describes the industry work as repetitive, strenuous, and sometimes dangerous. Bakari works on his feet all day packing and sorting product and moving freight from truck to truck. Bakari has worked for a series of temp agencies and describes instances where temporary workers have to complete all of their tasks manually while permanent employees benefit from using machines and forklifts.

In addition, warehouses also reach dangerous temperatures during the summer. "It's hot, you know? We have these 90-degree days in the summertime and... you're working for 10 to 12 hours... it's just, it's rough. You get two 15-minute breaks and a half hour lunch. And then you're right back at it." In that kind of heat, the warehouse will provide bottled water, but they won't supply a fan. Bakari worked in a warehouse where a co-worker suffered a heart attack on her way home from work. "I've seen people get injured in these warehouses, and they kind of get like swept under the rug. That's why at Warehouse Workers for Justice, we try to stand up for people that don't know their rights."

Bakari reports that temp workers don't receive benefits like health insurance, paid sick days, vacation time, or holiday pay. On holidays, Bakari would work side by side with permanent employees getting holiday pay, and Bakari would remain at \$10 per hour.

Additionally, temp workers are often paid with an electronic debit card. "Instead of a paper, they give you a debit card. And if you don't have

access to the internet where you can look up your hours... you know the hours they missed... that opens the door for wage theft. You know, they take the hours from here, take the hours from there, and before you know it, they just stole thousands of dollars from workers."

Another critical issue that temp workers face is the cycle of unemployment. Bakari is currently unemployed and relies on stints of short-term employment. "I wanted some kind of opportunity to be hired on through the company or direct hire, and it never really happens." Bakari deserves to make an honest living, but he feels like he is discriminated against. "You work two months here and then... you got to go start over somewhere else, doing the same thing. It's just a revolving door... I'm someone that has a record, you know? And I don't know if that plays a part, but you know, we get discriminated against because of our criminal background and our race or our economic status."

Bakari is motivated to organize not only because of wage theft and discriminatory hiring practices, but also the long history of people who've organized before him. "We fight because, you know, there was people that fought for us before us, so we keep fighting for those that come after us."

In 2011, Bakari participated in a strike at Schneider warehouse—which moves products for Walmart—to increase the wage from \$8-\$9 per hour to \$11-\$12 per hour. Bakari is also campaigning to pass the Illinois Temp Workers Bill of Rights. Bakari wants workers to know that they have rights and they have power in numbers.





**REYNA MARTINEZ**  
**UFCW Local 770**  
**Retail**

Reyna Martinez moved to Los Angeles from Oaxaca, Mexico when she was eight years old. She attended college in Santa Barbara, where she is currently raising her two children, ages 15 and 10. She has worked for the supermarket chain Albertson's for 14 years. "I like everything I do at store level. I believe in doing it with passion. If you don't have passion for something, then there's really no point in doing it."

Reyna joined the United Food and Commercial Local 770 union 12 years ago during the supermarket strikes of 2004. As a result, she became a full-time employee, with a guarantee of 40 hours every week and health insurance for her and her family.

However, many issues persist, including wage theft and discrimination. While outright wage theft is rare, "they hire you as a courtesy clerk, but they'll make you work grocery, and then they won't pay you grocery wages." The company frequently asks workers to work in multiple departments, but workers are not paid more for working jobs that require more training and skill to complete. The result is workers are often paid for a less demanding job than the one they are performing.

Discrimination can be a roadblock to job mobility. Each time Reyna is transferred to a new store, new managers question her ability because of her gender and physique. Despite being an experienced dairy manager, Reyna said store managers do not expect her to be able to do the job. "In grocery stores, they look at you as a woman, and all they can say is, 'you don't have the muscle to do this job.' You have to work 50 percent harder to show you're capable of doing

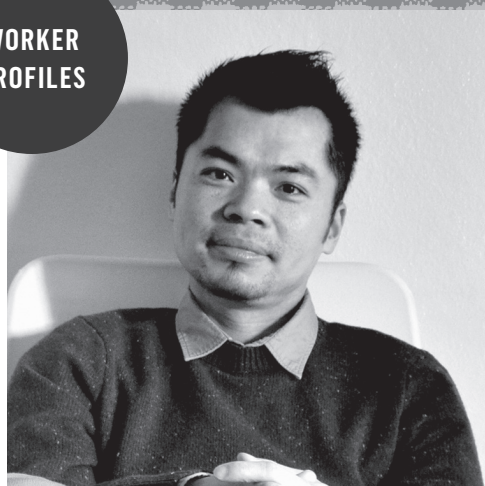
the job than a guy would."

Reyna has also faced discrimination for her union involvement, including a demotion when she spoke up about unfair management practices. "After [speaking up], they began nit-picking on petty little things... like not making a shelf tag. To me, it was backlash for me being outspoken. I took pictures of my back room every time I left." However, Reyna is hopeful that things will improve, thanks to support from the union. "I have complete faith with my union. I'm pretty confident that there's a good chance of me getting my job back."

Reyna has been a union steward in the past and continues to assist her co-workers in understanding their rights. She is not afraid to ask for help in the workplace when it comes to working safely, and she attributes this to the strong union presence. She stresses the importance of education in addition to strong union support. "A lot of people don't know what their rights are. The company will get away with treating us poorly if we're not paying attention."

## WORKER PROFILES

Photo: Pioneer Valley Workers Center



### JIANG Pioneer Valley Workers Center Service

Jiang moved from China to the United States when he was 19 years old because his family wanted him to live a better life. When he arrived in the U.S., he began working in the restaurant industry. For the past 14 years, he has held several jobs, including cashier, kitchen helper, cook, and, most recently, sushi chef. Jiang explained that sushi chefs typically work 70-72 hours a week with only one day off. "You are spending most of your time in the restaurant. And you don't know anything going on outside of the restaurant. It's very isolated. Like a prison system."

Jiang described a typical day for a sushi chef at the last restaurant he worked. The restaurant opened around 10:00 a.m., and the first thing chefs did was prepare the food, fish, vegetables, and rice. The chefs would break for 10 or 15 minutes in the morning to eat breakfast and then wait for customers to come in for lunch. The same cycle would be repeated before lunch. After lunch, sushi chefs would break from 3:00 to 4:30 p.m. and then return to the restaurant to prepare more food until dinner rush hour began around 5:00 p.m. The restaurant typically slowed down around 9:00 p.m., and that's when the chefs would have dinner for 15 or 20 minutes before the restaurant closed at 10:00 p.m. (weekdays) or 11:00 p.m. (weekends). Jiang explained that other restaurant workers, like kitchen helpers or cooks, are denied those same breaks in their schedules.

The schedule is often so demanding that workers have to work while sick out of fear of being fired from their job. "If you got a cold, you still have to work. I remember I got food poisoning from something, and I felt really sick, but I still had to work. It was on a weekend when it is

very busy so you cannot leave. So I had to stay there and feel like I couldn't stand up. The boss wouldn't let me go home... that was really bad."

Jiang also witnessed discriminatory practices against immigrants and workers who didn't speak English. He reported that opportunities to get a promotion were difficult for immigrant workers. "We don't have a choice! Most of us are undocumented, and then most of us don't speak English, so working in a restaurant is a job that is easy to get." He thinks that in many of the Asian restaurants, owners pay Latino workers below minimum wage while his peers are paid minimum wage for the same position. "Asian workers make more, 300 dollars a month more, than the Latino workers, even though they do the same job."

To improve these unjust working conditions, Jiang is volunteering with the Pioneer Valley Workers Center in Western Massachusetts to work with key city council members to pass an anti-wage theft ordinance. "So the ordinance links to the... liquor license of the restaurant. So if the restaurant doesn't pay workers minimum wage or doesn't give any paid sick days or other benefits... their liquor license can be suspended for a while until they fix the problem."

Beyond protecting workers' rights, Jiang believes that in order "to have a sustainable food system we need to have sustainable labor practices. The restaurant workers, farmworkers, they need to be treated equally. They need to be respected."



Photo: UNITE HERE

**NAHIMA AGUINIGA**  
**UNITE HERE Local 19**  
**Service**

Nahima Aguiniga came to the United States from Nicaragua when she was four. She is currently 34 years old and is a single mother to two children: her 15-year old son and nine-year old daughter. She holds a food prep position for the Eurest food service company at the Intel cafeteria in the Silicon Valley, where she is in charge of three breakfast and lunch food stations: the smoothie bar, continental breakfast, and the peanut butter and jelly bar. Nahima has to stock, clean, and service the stations and customers throughout the day and clean up when she is finished. She works from 5:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. during which time she is on her feet and running around non-stop. In addition, her job involves unsafe and dirty working conditions and disrespectful behavior of managers. Her job issues are compounded by the difficulty she's had securing affordable housing close to work.

Nahima lives in Tracy, California and has about an hour-long commute to the Silicon Valley. To make it to work on time, Nahima has to wake up at 3:00 a.m. in order to get herself and her kids ready. She then drops them at their grandfather's house on her way to work so he can help them get to school.

One of the main challenges for Nahima at work is that they are constantly understaffed. "We're beyond understaffed. We're so understaffed that it's ridiculous... It's exhausting. It's very stressful. There are people who have their station and... during lunchtime they have to help with two, three other stations." During busy periods, Nahima can't even leave her station to use the bathroom for up to 3 hours at a time.

When Nahima or her children are sick and

she misses a day of work, there are not enough staff to adequately cover for her. On top of recovering from being sick or the stress of taking care of a sick child, she knows that when she comes in the next day, she'll have to do extra work. "They just put the cart in there and don't refill anything. It's a punishment for missing a day of work."

At the time of our interview, Nahima was on the organizing committee of a UNITE HERE Local 19 campaign to organize the workers at the Intel Cafeteria. Nahima and the other committee members had been working with the UNITE HERE local for over two years to organize, continuing the struggle as Intel stopped working with one food service contractor (Guckenheimer Corporate Dining) and hired another (Eurest). "It's been a long fight. It's been a long process. It's been a lot of tears... I'm very proud of what we've done."

The organizing campaign achieved a number of key results for the Intel workers. "Since we started organizing with the union, they gave us a 20 percent raise. And then they also gave a \$55 dollar food credit every two weeks. If it wasn't for the raise, I wouldn't be able to afford health insurance."

Only a couple of months after we interviewed Nahima, on September 15, 2016, the workers voted to join UNITE HERE Local 19. Nahima's two children are what inspire her to be strong and to fight for what she believes will make a safer and better workplace. She hopes to set an example of strength and leadership for her children and for others who seek better working conditions.

Nahima told us about a moment during the campaign she was especially proud of. "On April 27th, we had a civil disobedience. We had close to 400 community members come with us. My daughter rallied right next to me, side by side, holding the UNITE HERE Local 19 banner, holding it with me. That's going to be something my daughter remembers when she gets to be my age. She's going to be telling her own kids about it."







## SECTION 5

# MEMBER WORK AND VICTORIES

## THE GOOD FOOD PURCHASING PROGRAM



The Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP) is a comprehensive institutional food procurement program that offers a pathway towards sustainable and socially-just regional food economies. Developed by the Los Angeles Food Policy Council with support from the Food Chain Workers Alliance and many other stakeholders, the GFPP was adopted by the City of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles Unified School District in 2012.<sup>63</sup>

Combining the five value categories of local economies, environmental sustainability, valued workforce, humane treatment of animals, and health and nutrition, the GFPP uses a multi-sector framework to include stakeholders from across the food system. Similar to LEED certification, the Program requires that suppliers and food items meet baseline standards across the five values, and each value category has three tiers of standards, except nutrition, which has a checklist. The program urges institutions and their suppliers to reach higher than the basic minimum.

While various food procurement policies exist around the U.S., the GFPP is unique for its requirement of labor standards. Tier one requires employers to comply with international labor standards and domestic labor laws, which this report has shown remain a core challenge for many workers in the food system. The second tier is awarded to suppliers who are fair trade certified or have social responsibility policies to provide safe working conditions, benefits, and living wages. The top tier is reserved for companies whose employees have a union contract, are a worker-owned cooperative, or are certified by programs with strong labor standards.

The Program, now managed by the Center for Good Food Purchasing, has already helped to redirect significant funding to local companies with high standards. The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), with a budget of about \$150 million per year, serves 750,000 meals each day. Since the adoption of the GFPP, roughly \$12 million annually has been redirected to local growers, and the district has doubled the proportion of its produce budget spent on local food to about 50 to 72 percent, depending on the season. This has led to the creation of at least 200 well-paying jobs in Los Angeles County, on farms, in fruit and vegetable processing, and in bread manufacturing and distribution. GFPP shows that institutional purchasing power can influence how our tax dollars are spent and impact how food is grown, processed, packaged, and distributed.<sup>64</sup>

The Teamsters Joint Council No. 7, an Alliance member, led the coalitions to win adoption

of GFPP by San Francisco Unified School District and Oakland Unified School District in 2016. The Alliance, other member groups, and allies are leading adoption campaigns in other cities around the U.S., building coalitions with those focused on the environment, public health, local farms and fisheries, and animal welfare.



Photo: Rural & Migrant Ministry

## NEW YORK STATE FARMWORKER FAIR PRACTICES ACT

While the New Deal saw a number of laws and regulations enacted to protect and empower workers, farmworkers and domestic workers, most of whom were Black, were excluded from new labor laws to secure the votes of Southern Democrats. FCWA member organization Rural & Migrant Ministry has been a champion for updating laws to cover farmworkers in New York State and has succeeded in requiring clean drinking water and sanitation facilities for workers as well as recent increases in the minimum wage.

The proposed Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act would ensure that farmworkers in New York have the same rights as other workers, including the right to organize, for employers to carry disability insurance, for workers to have a right to overtime pay, and a required day of rest. As of September 2016, the Act is under consideration and remains the key component of Rural & Migrant Ministry's legislative agenda.

## WAGE THEFT ORDINANCES

Problems of wage theft—when employers fail to pay workers the full amount they have earned—are emblematic of the low wage economy. The scale of the problem is immense—in 2012, employees recovered over \$933 million through wage theft cases, and this only involves amounts that have been reported and recovered.<sup>65</sup> To put this in perspective, it is “more than the total amount lost in all bank, residential, convenience store, gas station, and street robberies put together.”<sup>66</sup> A survey of low-wage workers in New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago indicate that in a typical week, two thirds of workers experienced at least one pay violation, for a yearly average of \$2,634 lost wages out of \$17,616 annual earnings.<sup>67</sup>

A number of FCWA member organizations are actively advocating for anti-wage theft laws. For example, in March of 2016, the city of East Orange, New Jersey passed an anti-wage theft ordinance after a call for action from a coalition of organizations, including the Laundry Workers Center United.<sup>68</sup> The legislation empowers the city to suspend licenses and permits to businesses that violate the ordinance.

Similar legislation has been passed in Cincinnati through the work of the Cincinnati Inter-faith Workers Center. The first of its kind in Ohio, the Cincinnati wage theft ordinance enables officials to return lost wages to workers and bars offenders from working with the city.

Along with the Laundry Workers Center United, the Worker Justice Center of New York is part of a large coalition calling on New York State to enact similar legislation, the Securing Wages Earned Against Theft, or SWEAT, bill. These reforms will help strengthen regulations

and procedures around wage theft and to increase the likelihood that workers will be able to secure payment of unpaid wages for work already performed from their employers.

## EPA WORKER PROTECTION STANDARDS

Exposure to pesticides is a major issue for farmworkers and has been routinely linked to higher rates of health issues and diseases.<sup>69</sup> FCWA members the Farmworker Association of Florida (FWAF) and CATA—the Farmworker Support Committee worked to win stronger improvements in the Environmental Protection Agency’s Worker Protection Standards to protect farmworkers from pesticides. Taking effect in January of 2017, the strengthened standards include annual training of farmworkers, minimum age requirements for pesticide handling, mandatory record keeping, and anti-retaliation provisions among other changes.<sup>70</sup> These standards are vitally important to increase protections for farmworkers and their children against exposure to toxic chemicals.



Photo: Farmworkers Association of Florida

## MINIMUM WAGE INCREASES

In July of 2016, the City of San Francisco raised its minimum wage to \$13 per hour, one stop on an eventual \$15 per hour by 2018. FCWA member Young Workers United (YWU) was part of a broad coalition pushing for this legislation. The higher minimum wage provides opportunities for low-wage workers to meet the high costs of living in San Francisco and a chance to continue living where they work and contribute to their communities. Through work on this campaign, YWU was able to educate and mobilize many minimum wage workers and recruit them for membership events and leadership development trainings. Beyond ensuring that workers know how to exercise their rights in the workplace, YWU has been able to recruit members to help educate and organize other workers around problems in the workplace.

FCWA members in other parts of the U.S. have also organized to win increases in the minimum wage at the city, county, and state levels of government.

Eric Brown, member of the Restaurant Opportunities Center of NY, speaking in support of paid sick days

## PAID SICK DAYS

In 2012, *The Hands That Feed Us* report found that 53 percent of workers reported going to work while sick. In addition, 79 percent of workers reported not having or knowing if they had paid sick days. Since then, many legislative victories have led to the implementation of paid sick days in cities across the country. FCWA member the Restaurant Opportunities Center of New York was a leader in the passage of the Earned Sick Time Act in 2014 in NYC. The Earned Sick Time Act provides paid sick time to nearly 1.2 million working New Yorkers who had no access to paid sick time when they or their family members



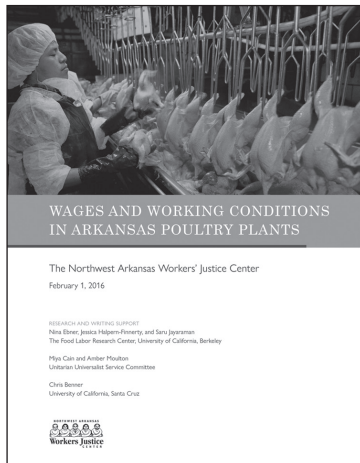
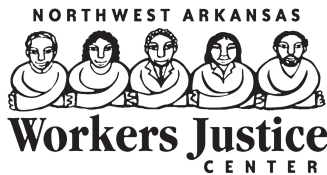
Photo: Restaurant Opportunities Center of New York

are ill, and it ensures that workers—even in the smallest of businesses—cannot be fired for taking a sick day. For the 3.4 million private sector workers in New York City, the Earned Sick Time Act creates a legal right to a minimum amount of sick time that an employer cannot withdraw and ensures that workers can use this time to care for ill loved ones.



## FAIR FOOD PROGRAM EXPANSION

In 2015, Ahold USA became the 14th corporation to join the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' award-winning social responsibility Fair Food Program, bringing worker-certified Fair Food tomatoes to over 50 million new customers a month in nearly 780 new stores in 14 states. The Fair Food Program, which protects the rights of tens of thousands of workers on farms across the east coast, from Florida to New Jersey, has been called “one of the great human rights success stories of our day” by the *Washington Post*.



## REPORTS ON THE POULTRY INDUSTRY

The Northwest Arkansas Worker Justice Center has recently been organizing and educating workers around major problems in the poultry industry. They have recently released two reports, including *Wages and Working Conditions in Arkansas Poultry Plants*, which describes the inhumane working conditions inside the poultry plants in Arkansas, and *No Relief*, which exposed workplace violations like workers being forced to wear diapers to compensate for the insufficient break times.<sup>71</sup> These reports, combined with a series of rallies delivering over 100,000 signatures at Tyson plants in demand for safer and more humane working conditions, have led to tangible changes in conditions for poultry workers. NAWAJC has also helped to pass wage theft and regulation of poultry line speeds as priorities for the 2017-18 Arkansas Legislative Session.





## SECTION 6

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Significant changes are necessary in order to address issues of poor wages and working conditions across the food system. Raising minimum wages and mandating benefits will ensure that workers have the capacity to feed their families, protect their own personal health, and produce our food in fair working conditions. Strengthening and enforcing labor regulations will help to raise standards for all workers by not allowing bad actors to undercut honest employers. Both policymakers and consumers can take steps to improve job conditions across the food system.

### POLICYMAKERS:

- 1 Minimum wages must be increased, and the tipped minimum wage for workers in the food service sector and the piece rate pay system should be abolished.** Policies for \$15 per hour are being enacted in cities and states across the country, and all parts of the U.S. should follow suit. Wage increases should be indexed for inflation.
- 2 Affordable healthcare must be provided for all workers.** This is not only to ensure that workers remain healthy, but will also help to improve overall public health and food safety issues.
- 3 Paid sick leave legislation enables workers to stay home from work when they are unhealthy.** While some localities have enacted paid sick leave for larger businesses, many workers remain without this important benefit.
- 4 Research shows that anti-wage theft legislation can greatly reduce the amount of money stolen from paychecks provided the legislation is strong, penalties are high, and the laws are enforced.** Policymakers should strengthen these laws and use permit and licensing powers to punish employers who routinely steal wages.
- 5 The right to organize should be guaranteed for workers throughout the food system, including protection from retaliation.** Collective bargaining leads to higher wages and benefits and a stronger voice on the job around issues such as health and safety. Policymakers should actively support on-the-ground organizing efforts as well as legislation to strengthen labor laws.

## CONSUMERS:

- 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](http://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, as well as pro-worker certification programs like the Fair Food Program and the Agricultural Justice Project. Policymakers are ultimately responsible to the voting public, and lobbying representatives can often influence their policy decisions.
- 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.



## SECTION 7

# THE FOOD CHAIN WORKERS ALLIANCE & MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

The Food Chain Workers Alliance (FCWA) was founded in 2009 to overcome the challenges of grassroots labor efforts operating in isolation across the national food chain and to lift up the voices of food workers in the growing sustainable food movement. With 29 member organizations, the FCWA has a unified vision and defined set of organizational priorities: to build a more sustainable food system that respects workers' rights, is based on the principles of social, economic, and racial justice, and in which everyone has access to healthy and affordable food. Through joint organization campaigns, worker retreats and trainings, policy advocacy, and consumer education, the Alliance is working towards a more sustainable food system that goes beyond fresh and local food and fully incorporates practices of justice.

The FCWA presents a unique model of cross-sector labor organizing, one that builds strategic alliances between labor unions, worker centers, and non-profits. By providing a space to approach the struggles of food workers from a system-wide perspective, the FCWA not only functions as a collective voice for workers, but also allows for these workers to speak in the national conversation on food, economic, and social issues, including federal legislative issues such as the minimum wage.

The Alliance for Fair Food

Brandworkers International

The California Institute for Rural Studies (CIRS)

The Cincinnati Interfaith Workers Center

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers

Comité de Apoyo a los Trabajadores Agrícolas  
(CATA—The Farmworker Support Committee)

Community to Community

Fair World Project

Familias Unidas por la Justicia

Farmworker Association of Florida

International Labor Rights Forum

Laundry Workers Center United

Migrant Justice

Mississippi Workers Center for Human Rights

Northwest Arkansas Workers Justice Center

OUR Walmart

Pioneer Valley Workers Center

Restaurant Opportunities Centers United

Rural and Migrant Ministry

Rural Community Workers Alliance

The Street Vendor Project

Teamsters Joint Council 7

United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW)  
Local 770

UNITE HERE Food Service Division

Warehouse Workers for Justice

The Warehouse Worker Resource Center

The Workers Center of Central New York

The Worker Justice Center of New York

Young Workers United



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## APPENDIX A: QUANTITATIVE METHODS

We used the following data sets for this report: American Community Survey (2010-2014), Current Population Survey's Annual Social and Economic Supplement (2003-2016), Outgoing Rotation Groups (2003-2016), and Food Security Supplement (2001-2014), and Occupational Employment Statistics (2015). We obtained the former four sets from Integrated Public Use Microdata Series by the University of Minnesota<sup>72</sup> and latter from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.<sup>73</sup> In addition, we relied upon analysis by Hirsch and Macpherson of union membership and coverage from the Current Population Survey.<sup>74</sup>

We defined the food chain based on the industries in Table A.

TABLE A		FOOD SYSTEM SECTOR	INDUSTRY DESCRIPTION	NAICS INDUSTRY CODE	CPS/CENSUS INDUSTRY CODE
FOOD CHAIN INDUSTRIES	PRODUCTION		Crop Production	111	170
			Animal Production	112	180
			Fishing, Hunting, and Trapping	114	280
			Support Activities for Crop and Animal Production	115	290
	PROCESSING		Animal Food Processing	3111	1070
			Grain and Oilseed Milling	3112	
			Sugar and Confectionary Product Manufacturing	3113	1080
			Fruit and Vegetable Preserving and Specialty Food Manufacturing	3114	1090
			Dairy Product Manufacturing	3115	1170
			Animal Slaughtering and Processing	3116	1180
			Seafood Product Preparation and Packaging	3117	1280
			Bakeries and Tortilla Manufacturing (except 311811 Retail Bakeries)	3118	1270
			Other Food Manufacturing	3119	1290
			Beverage Manufacturing	3121	1370
			Tobacco Manufacturing	3122	1390
			Agricultural chemical manufacturing	3253	2180
			Agricultural implement manufacturing	33311	3070
	DISTRIBUTION		Grocery and Related Product Merchant Wholesalers	4244	4470
			Farm product raw materials, merchant wholesalers	4245	4480
			Beer, Wine, and Distilled Alcoholic Beverage Merchant Wholesalers	4248	4560
			Farm supplies, merchant wholesalers	42491	4570
			Truck Transportation	484	6170
			Warehousing and storage	493	6390
	RETAIL		Food and Beverage Stores	445	
			Grocery Stores	4451	4970
			Specialty Food Stores	4452	4980
			Beer, Wine, and Liquor Stores	4453	4990
			Retail Bakeries	311811	1190
	SERVICE		Food Services and Drinking Places (Service)	722	
			Special Food Services	7223	
			Drinking Places (Alcoholic Beverages)	7224	8690
			Restaurants and Other Eating Places	7225	8680

## APPENDIX A: QUANTITATIVE METHODS

We categorized positions based on the following occupations in Table B.

TABLE B	POSITION	CENSUS	SOC	OCCSOC
FOOD CHAIN OCCUPATIONS	CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICERS	10, 30	11-1011, 11-1031	1110XX
	MANAGERS	20, 40-430	11-1021, 11-2011-11-9199	111021, 112011-119161
	PROFESSIONALS	500-950, 1005-1240, 1300-1560, 1600-1965, 2000-2060, 2100-2160, 2200-2550, 2600-2960, 3000-3540, 3600-3655	13-1011-13-2099, 15-1111-15-2090, 17-1010-17-3031, 19-1010, 19-4090, 21-1010-21-2099, 23-1011-23-2090, 25-1000-25-90XX, 27-1010-27-4099, 29-1011-29-9000, 31-1010-31-909X	131011-132099, 151121-1520XX, 171010- 173031, 191010-1940YY, 211010-212099, 2310XX-232090, 251000-2590XX, 271010-2740XX, 291011-299000, 311010-31909X
	SUPERVISORS	3700-3730, 4000-4010, 4200-4210, 4300-4320, 4700-4710, 5000, 6005, 6200, 7000, 7700, 9000	33-1011-33-1099, 35-1011-35-1012, 37-1011-37-1012, 39-1010-39-1021, 41- 1011-41-1012, 43-1011, 45-1011, 47-1011, 49-1011, 51-1011, 53-1000,	331011-331099, 351011-351012, 371011- 371012, 391010-391021, 411011-411012, 431011, 451011, 471011, 491011, 511011, 531000
	OFFICE WORKERS	5010-5940	432011-43-9199	432011-439XXX
	FRONTLINE WORKERS	3740-3955, 4020-4160, 4220-4250, 4340-4650, 4720-4965, 6010-6130, 6210-6940, 7010-7630, 7710-8965, 9030-9420, 9500-9750	33-2011-33-909X, 35-2010-35-9099, 37-201X-37-3010, 39-2011-39-9099, 41-2010-41-9099, 45-2011-45-4020, 47-2011-47-50XX, 49-2011-49-909X, 51-2011-51-9199, 53-2010-53-60XX, 53-7011-53-7199	332011-33909X, 352010-3590XX, 37201X-373010, 392011-399099, 412010-419099, 452011-454020, 472011-4750XX, 492011-4990XX, 512011-5191XX, 532010-5360XX, 5370XX-5371XX

Tables are available for download at our website.<sup>75</sup>



## APPENDIX B: QUALITATIVE METHODS

### INTERVIEW METHODS

Between June and September 2016, we conducted 20 hour-long semi-structured interviews with workers across the five food chain sectors (production, processing, distribution, retail, and service) lasting for about an hour. A common interview script was used which built from open-ended questions to more specific questions. We developed this semi-structured approach because of the need to allow workers to unveil aspects and areas of the work that are not directly addressed in data, widely known, or well understood. Interview candidates were selected with help from the FCWA and their membership organizations in order to ensure depth and breadth across areas of work in each sector. Candidates were also selected based on the following considerations: work experience (including length of time in a specific job or sector) and involvement in the sector as their primary area of work, their availability and willingness to be interviewed, and with an eye for demographic diversity reflected in the sector as a whole. Interviews were conducted with workers from the following Food Chain Workers Alliance member and ally organizations:

Brandworkers  
Farmworkers Association of Florida  
Laundry Workers Center United  
Migrant Justice  
Mississippi Workers Center for Human Rights  
Northwest Arkansas Workers Justice Center  
OUR Walmart  
Pioneer Valley Workers Center  
Restaurant Opportunities Centers United  
The Street Vendor Project  
Teamsters Joint Council 7  
Teamsters Local 63  
United Food Commercial Workers Local 770  
UNITE HERE Food Service Division  
Warehouse Worker Resource Center  
Warehouse Workers for Justice

## ENDNOTES

- 1 We used the following racial categories: white is white alone, not Hispanic; Black is Black alone, not Hispanic; Latino refers to Latino alone; Asian is Asian alone and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, not Hispanic; Native is defined as American Indian or Alaskan Native; and Other is Some Other Race and Two or More Races.
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# NO PIECE OF THE PIE: U.S. FOOD WORKERS IN 2016



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