

# The Number of Hired Farmworkers Increased in 2000 and Most Now Come From Minority Groups

Jack L. Runyan

After decreasing between 1996 and 1998, the number of hired farmworkers increased between 1999 and 2000. Weekly earnings decreased in 2000 and hired farmworkers remained one of the occupations with the lowest earnings and family incomes. In 2000 members of minority groups accounted for more than 50 percent of the hired farm work force for the first time.

The agricultural workforce consists of farm operators, unpaid workers and hired farmworkers. Hired farmworkers (persons who do farm work for cash wages or salary) continue to account for 30 percent of annual average agricultural employment in 2000. Especially during critical agricultural production periods such as planting and harvesting, hired farmworkers provide an important supply of labor when labor demand exceeds the capabilities of operators and their families. Hired farmworkers include persons who reported their primary employment during the survey week as farm managers (7 percent),

supervisors of farmworkers (5 percent), nursery workers (4 percent), and farmworkers engaged in planting, cultivating, and harvesting crops or tending to livestock (84 percent).

## The Number of Hired Farmworkers Increases

After decreasing between 1996 and 1999, the average number of persons, 15 years of age and older, who reported hired farmwork as their primary employment increased by almost 5 percent, rising from an average of 840,000 per week in 1999 to 878,000 in 2000, according to data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) microdata earnings file. Even with this increase in the number of hired farmworkers, they still accounted for less than 1 percent of all wage and salary workers employed in the U.S. (120,972,000 persons). However, the CPS may undercount farmworkers, who are more likely to live in unconventional living quarters, and are likely to be Hispanic or undocumented foreign immigrants who avoid enumerators.

## More Than Half of All Hired Farmworkers Were Members of a Minority

In 2000, about 53 percent of the hired farmworkers were either Hispanic (46.4 percent) or belonged to Black and other non-Hispanic minority groups (6.4 percent) (table 1). The percent of hired farmworkers belonging to a racial/ethnic minority group is higher than for all other major occupation groups, except private household services (fig. 1). In 1990, about 39 percent of hired farmworkers were members of a minority, and this percentage grew fairly steadily over the decade (table 2). However, the high participation rate for minorities in the hired farm workforce has not occurred in all regions and establishments. For example, the hired farm workforce in the West census region and in crop production has been predominately members of a minority group, while in the Northeast and Midwest census regions and in livestock production the hired farmwork forces have been predominately white non-Hispanics during the 1990-2000 period (table 2).

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Table 1

### Demographic characteristics of hired farmworkers and wage and salary workers, 2000

Almost all demographic characteristics of the hired farm workforce differ from those of all wage and salary workers

Characteristic	Annual averages			
	Hired farmworkers		All wage and salary workers	
	Thousands	Percent	Thousands	Percent
All	878	100	120,972	100
Gender:				
Male	720	82.1*	62,953	52.0
Female	158	17.9*	58,019	48.0
Racial/ethnic group:				
White	414	47.2*	87,648	72.4
Hispanic	408	46.4*	13,645	11.3
Black and others	56	6.4*	19,679	16.3
Age (years):				
Less than 20	123	14.0*	7,590	6.3
20-24	104	12.0	12,982	10.7
25-34	204	23.2	28,352	23.4
35-44	208	23.7	32,395	26.8
45-54	127	14.5*	25,604	21.2
55 and over	111	12.6	14,049	11.6
Median age		35*		38
Marital status:				
Married	483	55.0	67,654	55.9
Widowed, divorced, or separated	72	8.3*	17,734	14.7
Never married	322	36.7*	35,584	29.4
Schooling completed:				
0-4 years	117	13.4*	944	0.8
5-8 years	184	21.0*	3,356	2.7
9-11 years	186	21.2*	11,743	9.7
12 years <sup>1</sup>	226	25.7*	37,325	31.2
13 or more years	164	18.7*	67,204	55.6
Citizenship status:				
U.S. citizen	563	64.1*	111,329	92.0
Not U.S. citizen	315	35.9*	9,643	8.0
Employment status:				
Full-time	709	80.8	99,949	82.6
Part-time	169	19.2	21,023	17.4

<sup>1</sup> Schooling completed: 12 years means that a person received a high school diploma, GED, or equivalent degree.

\*Significantly different from wage and salary workers at the 95-percent confidence level.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the Current Population Survey earnings microdata file.

### Hired Farmworkers as a Group Are Aging Faster Than Wage and Salary Workers

The median age of hired farmworkers increased by 25 percent (from 28 to 35 years old) between 1990 and 2000 (table 3). During the same period, the median age of wage and salary workers increased 15 percent (from 33 to 38 years old) (table 4). Still the median age of hired farmworkers is significantly less than that for all wage and salary workers.

In 2000, the median age of hired farmworkers was highest in the South (38 years) and lowest in the Northeast and Midwest (31 years). The median age of hired farmworkers employed in crop production (37 years) was higher than the median age of hired farmworkers employed in livestock production (32 years) and other establishments (34 years).

### Other Hired Farmworker Demographics Remain Constant

The demographic characteristics of hired farmworkers, other than age and racial/ethnic composition, have shown little change since 1990 (table 3). Hired farmworkers are more likely than wage and salary workers to be male, Hispanic, younger, never married, less educated, and non-U.S. citizens (tables 3 and 4). In 2000, over 80 percent of hired farmworkers were male, nearly 40 percent Hispanic, more than three-fourths less than 45 years of age, and more than one-half had not finished 12 years of education. By contrast, over 50 percent of all wage and salary workers were males in 2000, nearly 75 percent were white, two-thirds were less than 45 years of age, and more than half had 13 or more years of education.

Table 2

**Percent of hired farmworkers belonging to a minority, 1990-2000**

*Hired farmworkers in the South and West, and those employed in crop production and agricultural services, are more likely to be members of a minority group*

Characteristic	Annual averages											
	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	
	<i>Thousands</i>											
Number of workers	886	884	848	803	793	849	906	889	875	840	878	
	<i>Percent</i>											
All workers	39.0	39.7	40.3	42.5	48.8	46.5	41.1	47.6	47.6	49.4	52.8	
Census region:												
Northeast	9.4	9.2	7.5	7.2	4.2	8.9	7.7	20.7	13.3	15.1	4.0	
Midwest	6.3	5.5	5.0	1.6	3.8	5.0	3.5	4.0	4.0	7.2	7.8	
South	42.4	44.2	44.8	47.2	53.0	41.0	46.4	49.6	49.9	50.1	54.2	
West	65.1	64.1	67.1	68.7	74.3	77.9	66.8	71.0	71.4	74.8	78.3	
Establishment:												
Crop production	50.8	55.1	56.9	58.8	77.0	66.3	57.4	62.4	65.8	64.1	70.2	
Livestock production	23.1	20.2	19.1	19.6	25.0	20.9	16.8	28.6	25.0	24.4	27.0	
Other <sup>1</sup>	52.6	41.9	52.7	43.8	48.1	49.4	60.1	57.5	46.9	64.0	56.9	

<sup>1</sup>Other establishments refer to agricultural services.

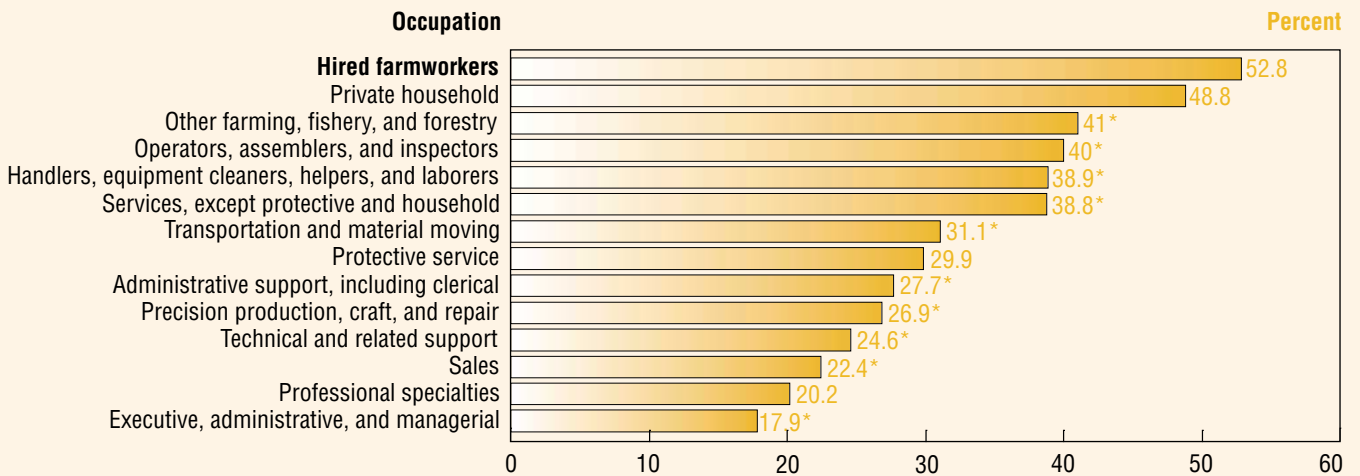
Note: Data for 1994 and later years are not directly comparable with data for 1993 and earlier years.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the Current Population Survey earnings microdata file.

Figure 1

**Percent of workers who belong to a minority group, by occupation, 2000**

*Hired farmworkers rank at the top of major occupational groups*



\*Significantly different from hired farmworkers at the 95-percent confidence level.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the Current Population Survey earnings microdata file.

Table 3

**Demographic and earnings characteristics of hired farmworkers, 1990-2000**

Although the number of hired farmworkers and their earnings have fluctuated, most of their demographic characteristics have remained stable

Characteristic	Annual averages										
	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
	<i>Thousands</i>										
Number of workers	886	884	848	803	793	849	906	889	875	840	878
	<i>Percent</i>										
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Gender:											
Male	82.9	82.4	83.8	84.7	83.7	84.5	84.2	83.3	83.8	80.7	82.1
Female	17.1	17.6	16.2	15.3	16.3	15.5	15.8	16.7	16.2	19.3	17.9
Racial/ethnic group:											
White	61.0	60.3	59.7	57.5	51.3	53.5	58.9	52.4	52.4	50.1	47.2
Hispanic	29.4	28.3	30.7	33.6	41.3	41.1	36.0	41.0	41.8	43.0	46.4
Black and other	9.6	11.4	9.6	8.9	7.4	5.3	5.1	6.6	5.8	6.4	6.4
Age (years):											
Less than 25	31.5	25.0	24.7	27.2	28.0	30.1	27.9	30.7	28.4	30.4	26.0
25-44	47.6	51.6	52.6	51.1	48.8	44.2	46.0	45.6	46.7	44.0	46.9
45-59	14.4	15.1	16.3	16.2	17.2	18.2	19.1	17.1	17.8	18.8	19.6
60 and older	6.5	8.3	6.4	5.5	6.0	7.5	7.0	6.6	7.1	6.8	7.5
Median age	28	30	30	29	32	32	34	33	33	33	35
Marital status:											
Married	53.3	53.4	53.5	51.8	58.5	58.5	56.3	52.1	51.9	55.5	55.0
Widowed, divorced, or separated	8.9	11.2	10.1	9.5	8.7	7.5	8.1	8.4	9.3	6.9	8.3
Never married	37.8	35.4	36.4	38.6	32.8	34.0	35.6	39.5	38.8	37.6	36.7
Schooling completed: <sup>1</sup>											
0-4 years	11.1	11.5	14.1	16.4	13.4	14.2	13.1	12.2	10.9	11.3	13.4
5-8 years	21.6	21.2	16.0	17.4	22.9	22.5	19.9	22.1	21.1	22.6	21.0
9-11 years	22.8	22.6	27.0	21.8	22.7	22.7	24.2	24.8	24.9	20.7	21.2
12 years	31.4	31.0	26.9	27.0	25.9	25.9	25.4	22.3	26.5	27.1	25.7
13 years or more	13.1	13.7	16.0	17.4	15.6	14.7	17.4	18.6	16.6	18.3	18.7
Employment status:											
Part-time	21.8	22.8	21.1	22.9	20.1	18.3	22.4	18.5	18.6	20.5	19.3
Full-time <sup>2</sup>	78.2	77.2	78.9	77.1	79.9	81.7	77.6	81.5	81.4	79.5	80.7
	<i>Dollars</i>										
Median weekly earnings: <sup>3</sup>											
Full-time workers <sup>2</sup>	316	303	295	298	290	294	304	297	304	331	319
All workers	264	266	245	262	273	271	274	268	276	289	280

<sup>1</sup>Schooling completed: 12 years means that a person received a high school diploma, GED, or equivalent degree.

<sup>2</sup>Full-time workers usually work 35 or more hours per week.

<sup>3</sup>Median earnings are in 2000 dollars.

Note: Data for 1994 and later years are not directly comparable with data for 1993 and earlier years.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the Current Population Survey earnings microdata file.

Table 4

**Demographic and earnings characteristics of wage and salary workers, 1990-2000***The demographic characteristics of all wage and salary workers have remained relatively unchanged*

Characteristics	Annual averages										
	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
	<i>Thousands</i>										
Number of workers	104,351	103,166	104,054	105,407	108,166	110,220	112,142	114,697	116,882	119,130	120,971
	<i>Percent</i>										
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Gender:											
Male	52.7	52.5	52.2	52.1	52.4	52.4	52.2	52.2	52.2	52.0	52.0
Female	47.3	47.5	47.8	47.9	47.6	47.6	47.8	47.8	47.8	48.0	48.0
Racial/ethnic group:											
White	78.3	78.1	77.9	77.7	76.3	76.2	75.0	74.0	73.4	73.1	72.4
Hispanic	7.9	8.0	8.0	8.2	9.3	9.5	9.7	10.4	10.6	10.8	11.3
Black and other	13.8	13.9	14.1	14.1	14.4	14.3	15.3	15.6	16.0	16.1	16.3
Age (years):											
Less than 25	15.8	17.2	16.7	16.6	17.1	16.8	16.2	16.4	16.7	16.8	17.0
25-44	56.5	55.4	55.2	54.7	54.3	53.9	53.8	53.0	52.1	51.2	50.2
45-59	21.8	21.7	22.5	23.2	23.4	24.0	24.7	25.4	25.9	26.6	27.2
60 and older	5.9	5.7	5.6	5.5	5.2	5.3	5.3	5.2	5.3	5.4	5.6
Median age	33	34	34	34	36	37	37	37	38	38	38
Marital status:											
Married	58.2	58.5	58.3	58.2	57.9	58.0	58.0	57.0	56.4	56.2	55.9
Widowed, divorced, or separated	14.3	14.3	15.4	14.6	14.5	14.4	14.5	14.6	14.7	14.6	14.7
Never married	27.5	27.2	27.2	27.1	27.6	27.6	27.5	28.4	28.9	29.2	29.4
Schooling completed: <sup>1</sup>											
0-4 years	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.8
5-8 years	4.0	3.7	3.0	2.8	2.8	2.7	2.7	2.8	2.7	2.7	2.7
9-11 years	10.8	10.2	10.1	9.8	9.5	9.5	9.7	10.0	10.2	9.9	9.7
12 years	39.4	39.2	35.0	34.4	33.3	32.7	32.4	32.4	31.8	31.6	31.2
13 years or more	44.8	46.0	51.0	52.2	53.6	54.3	54.4	54.0	54.5	55.1	55.6
Employment status:											
Part-time	18.4	19.6	19.9	19.9	20.3	19.0	18.9	18.4	18.2	18.0	17.4
Full-time <sup>2</sup>	81.6	80.4	80.1	80.1	79.7	81.0	81.1	81.6	81.8	82.0	82.6
	<i>Dollars</i>										
Median weekly earnings: <sup>3</sup>											
Full-time workers <sup>2</sup>	534	541	541	542	537	542	528	536	549	568	576
All workers	474	468	466	477	465	452	455	464	481	495	500

<sup>1</sup>Schooling completed: 12 years means that a person received a high school diploma, GED, or equivalent degree.<sup>2</sup>Full-time workers usually work 35 or more hours per week.<sup>3</sup>Median earnings are in 2000 dollars.

Note: Data for 1994 and later years are not directly comparable with data for 1993 and earlier years.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the Current Population Survey earnings microdata file.

Table 5

**Family income of hired farmworkers and wage and salary workers, 2000<sup>1</sup>***Hired farmworkers have significantly lower family incomes than all wage and salary workers*

Characteristics	Annual averages			
	All hired farmworkers	Full-time hired farmworkers	All wage and salary workers	Full-time wage and salary workers
	<i>Thousands</i>			
Total	878	709	120,972	99,949
	<i>Percent</i>			
Family income:				
Less than \$10,000	26.4 <sup>a</sup>	25.8 <sup>b</sup>	16.0	15.2 <sup>a</sup>
\$10,000-\$19,999	19.9 <sup>a</sup>	20.8 <sup>b</sup>	7.9	7.3 <sup>a</sup>
\$20,000-\$29,999	19.3 <sup>a</sup>	21.4 <sup>b</sup>	11.3	11.4
\$30,000-\$39,999	11.7	12.2	12.0	12.2
\$40,000-\$49,999	6.5 <sup>a</sup>	6.6 <sup>b</sup>	9.9	10.1 <sup>a</sup>
\$50,000 or more	16.2 <sup>a</sup>	13.2 <sup>b</sup>	42.9	43.8 <sup>a</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Combined income of all family members during the past 12 months. Includes money from jobs: net income from businesses, farms, and rents; pensions, dividends, interest, and social security payments; and any other money income received by family members who are 15 years of age and older.

<sup>a</sup>Significantly different from all wage and salary workers at the 95-percent confidence level.

<sup>b</sup>Significantly different from full-time wage and salary workers at the 95-percent confidence level.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the Current Population Survey earnings microdata file.

In 2000, 36 percent of hired farmworkers were not U.S. citizens, compared to 8 percent of all wage and salary workers. These percentages have remained fairly constant. Almost 78 percent of the non-U.S. citizens working as hired farmworkers were employed in the West region, where they accounted for 63 percent of the hired farmwork force. Crop production accounted for 72 percent of the non-U.S. citizen hired farmworkers. The West also had the largest percent (39 percent) of the non-citizen wage and salary workers, who accounted for 14 percent of the workforce in that region.

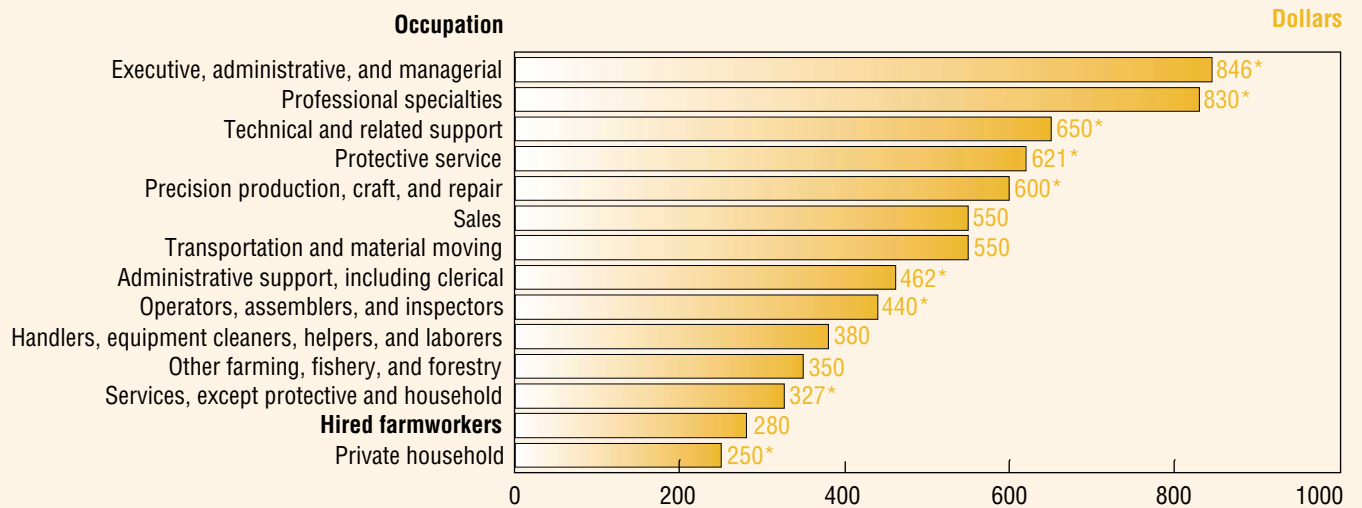
### After Increasing for 2 Years, Real Earnings of Hired Farmworkers Decreased in 2000

Between 1999 and 2000, the real average weekly earnings of hired farmworkers decreased from \$331 to \$319 for full-time workers and from \$289 to \$280 for all hired farmworkers (table 3). These decreases amount to about 4 percent for full-time workers and about 3 percent for all hired farmworkers. Real earnings for all wage and salary workers increased about 1 percent for both full-time and for all workers (table 4). As a result, hired farmworkers' earnings as a percent of all wage and salary earn-

ings for all workers fell from 58 percent in 1999 to 56 percent in 2000. Hired farmworkers continued to rank among the lowest paid wage and salary workers of 14 major occupational groups (fig. 2).

These low earnings are reflected in the annual family incomes of hired farmworkers. As shown in table 5, 46 percent of hired farmworkers had family incomes of less than \$20,000, while only 16 percent had \$50,000 or more in 2000. In comparison, about 23 percent of all wage and salary workers had family incomes of less than \$20,000, and 44 percent had \$50,000 or more. Only private household workers had as large a percentage of families with incomes less than \$20,000 (46 percent) as hired farmworkers. **RA**

Figure 2  
**Median weekly earnings of full-time workers, by occupation, 2000**  
*Hired farmworkers rank near the bottom of major occupational groups*



\*Significantly different from hired farmworkers at the 95-percent confidence level.  
 Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the Current Population Survey earnings microdata file.