

# Hired Farmworkers' Earnings Increased in 2001 But Still Trail Most Occupations

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After an increase between 1999 and 2000, the number of people employed as hired farmworkers decreased from 878,000 in 2000 to 745,000 in 2001, according to data from the 2001 Current Population Survey (CPS). Whether this decrease marks a new trend in farm labor numbers or represents a temporary adjustment to changes in the farm labor market remains to be seen. Although the number of hired farmworkers decreased, their median weekly earnings (in 2001 dollars) increased from \$288 to \$300. Still, hired farmworkers earn about the lowest earnings and family incomes.

The agricultural workforce consists of farm operators, unpaid workers, and hired farmworkers (persons who do farm work for cash wages or salary). According to data from the National Agricultural Statistics Service, hired farmworkers have increased their share of the agricultural work force since the 1940s and accounted, on average, for over one-third of agricultural employment in the 1990s (table 1). Hired farmworkers provide labor when demand exceeds the labor capabilities of operators and their families, which usually occurs

during critical production periods. Hired farmworkers include persons who reported their primary employment during the survey week as farm managers (10 percent), supervisors of farmworkers (5 percent), nursery workers (3 percent), and farmworkers engaged in planting, cultivating, and harvesting crops or tending to livestock (82 percent).

## After a 1-Year Decrease, Real Earnings of Hired Farmworkers Increased in 2001

Although the number of hired farmworkers declined, the median weekly earnings (in 2001 dollars) of those employed increased 5 per-

cent for those working full-time and 4 percent for all farmworkers (table 2). In comparison, the weekly earnings for full-time wage and salary workers increased only 0.7 percent. Despite hired farmworkers, both full-time and total, gaining on the relative earnings all workers, they are still one of the lowest paid of the 14 major occupational groups (fig. 1).

The increase in weekly earnings of hired farmworkers did not translate into increased family income, nor did their distribution by family income group change significantly between 2000 and 2001 (table 3). Although the weekly earnings for all wage and salary

Table 1

### Average U.S. farm employment by decade, 1910-1999

*Hired workers are becoming a larger part of total farm employment*

Years	Total workers employed		Family workers employed		Hired workers employed	
	1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent
1910-19	13,523	100	10,123	75	3,400	25
1920-29	13,047	100	9,670	74	3,377	26
1930-39	12,343	100	9,420	76	2,923	24
1940-49	10,382	100	8,010	77	2,372	23
1950-59	8,481	100	6,407	76	2,074	24
1960-69	5,837	100	4,290	73	1,547	27
1970-79	4,260	100	3,023	71	1,246	29
1980-89	na		na		na	
1990-99	3,103	100	1,974 <sup>1</sup>	64	1,129 <sup>2</sup>	36

na = data not available for all years in the decade because of budget considerations.

<sup>1</sup>Beginning in 1980, the work force was divided into self-employed workers (operators or partners), unpaid workers (anyone other than a self-employed worker), and hired workers. For purposes of this analysis, self-employed and unpaid were grouped under family workers.

<sup>2</sup>Beginning in 1980, agricultural service workers were reported separately from hired farmworkers, but their numbers were included in data shown for 1990-99 to make the estimates comparable to that of earlier decades.

Sources: Calculated by ERS using data from *Farm Employment and Wage Rates 1910-1990* and *Farm Labor*, National Agricultural Statistics Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

workers did not change between 2000 and 2001, the percentage of workers with family incomes of \$50,000 or more increased significantly (table 3).

Family incomes varied widely among hired farmworkers by race/ethnicity. White (non-Hispanic) workers and those who were U.S. citizens were more likely to have higher family incomes: 28 percent of White workers had family incomes of \$50,000 or more, over four times that of other farmworkers (table 4). Although the Hispanic and noncitizen groups may overlap (about 95 percent of noncitizens are Hispanic), over half of both groups had family incomes amounting to less than \$20,000 in 2001.

Few differences exist in family incomes by region and establishment (crop production, livestock production, and agricultural services). However, hired farmworkers in the Midwest were more likely to have incomes of \$50,000 or more (32 percent) than those in the West (12 percent). (In the Midwest, 93 percent of the hired farm workforce were White and citizens, and nearly two-thirds had completed 12 or more years of education. In the West, over 72 percent of the hired farm workforce were Hispanic, and over 58 percent were noncitizens.) Family incomes of crop and livestock workers did not differ from all hired farmworkers, but over 45 percent of agricultural service workers (who perform farmwork for others under contract) had family incomes under \$10,000. About 55 percent of the agricultural service workers were Hispanic and employed in the West, and about 47 percent were not U.S. citizens.

Table 2

**Median weekly earnings (in 2000 dollars) of hired farmworkers and all wage and salary workers, 1990-2001**

*Average weekly earnings of hired farmworkers as a percent of weekly earnings for all wage and salary workers has not changed significantly*

Year	Annual averages					
	Full-time workers			All workers		
	All wage and salary workers	Hired farm workers	Hired farmworkers/all wage and salary	All wage and salary workers	Hired farmworkers	Hired farmworkers/all wage and salary
	\$ per week	Percent		\$ per week	Percent	
1990-2001	546	316	56	488	271	57
1990	549	325	59	488	271	56
1991	557	312	56	481	273	57
1992	557	303	54	480	252	53
1993	558	306	55	490	270	55
1994	552	299	54	478	281	59
1995	558	302	54	465	279	60
1996	543	313	58	468	282	60
1997	552	306	55	478	276	58
1998	565	313	55	494	282	57
1999	585	340	58	509	298	59
2000	592	328	55	514	288	56
2001	596	345	58	510	300	59

Note: None were significantly different from 1990-2001 percent at the 95-percent confidence level.

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

**Other Demographic Characteristics of Hired Farmworkers Remain Constant**

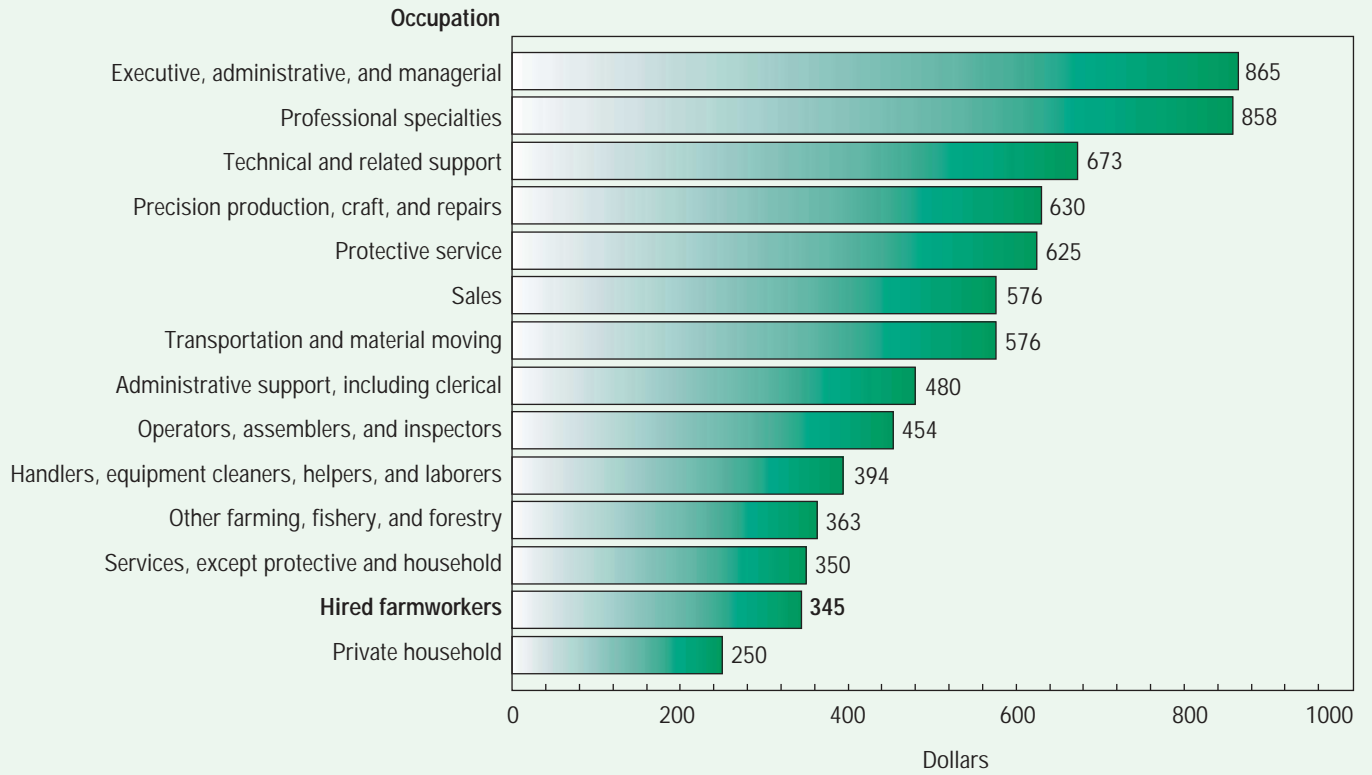
In 2001, over 80 percent of hired farmworkers were male, nearly 46 percent Hispanic, and nearly three-fourths younger than 45. More than one-half had not finished 12 years of school, and over one-third were not U.S. citizens (table 5). By contrast, slightly more than half of all wage and salary workers were male in 2001, over 70 percent were White, two-thirds were under 45 years of age, more than half had 13 or more years of school, and more than 90 percent were U.S. citizens.

The demographic characteristics of hired farmworkers (and all workers) have remained fairly constant since 1990 (tables 6 and 7). However, the share of Hispanics in both workforces has been increasing recently. Black and other non-Hispanic workers have been decreasing as a share of hired farmworkers, while minorities have been increasing as a share of all (wage and salary) workers. Both workforces are aging. The share of all (wage and salary) workers with 13 or more years of education is increasing, though this is not so for hired farmworkers. <sup>RA</sup>

Figure 1

**Median weekly earnings of full-time workers, by occupation, year**

*Hired farmworkers rank near the bottom of major occupation groups*



Note: All listed occupations are significantly different from hired farmworkers at the 95-percent confidence level.  
Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the Current Population Survey earnings.

Table 3

### Family income of hired farmworkers and wage/salary workers, 2000 and 2001<sup>1</sup>

Family incomes of hired farmworkers did not change between 2000 and 2001 and remained significantly lower than for all wage and salary workers

Item	Annual averages							
	Hired farmworkers				All wage and salary workers			
	All		Full-time		All		Full-time	
	2001	2000	2001	2000	2001	2000	2001	2000
	<i>Thousands</i>							
Total workers	745	878	601	708	120,836	120,979	99,600	99,949
	<i>Percent</i>							
Family income:								
Less than								
\$10,000	21.8 <sup>2</sup>	26.4 <sup>2</sup>	22.3 <sup>3</sup>	25.8 <sup>3</sup>	16.2	16.0	15.6 <sup>2*</sup>	15.2 <sup>2</sup>
\$10,000-\$19,999	19.8 <sup>2</sup>	19.9 <sup>2</sup>	21.8 <sup>3</sup>	20.8 <sup>3</sup>	7.3*	7.9	6.7 <sup>2*</sup>	7.3 <sup>2</sup>
\$20,000-\$29,999	20.7 <sup>2</sup>	19.3 <sup>2</sup>	22.2 <sup>3</sup>	21.4 <sup>3</sup>	10.4*	11.3	10.4*	11.4
\$30,000-\$39,999	13.2	11.7	14.0	12.2	11.4*	12.0	11.5*	12.2
\$40,000-\$49,999	6.7 <sup>2</sup>	6.5 <sup>2</sup>	5.2 <sup>3</sup>	6.6 <sup>3</sup>	9.7	9.9	9.8*	10.1 <sup>2</sup>
\$50,000 or more	17.8 <sup>2</sup>	16.2 <sup>2</sup>	14.5 <sup>3</sup>	13.2 <sup>3</sup>	45.0*	42.9	46.0 <sup>2*</sup>	43.8 <sup>2</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 and older.

<sup>2</sup>Significantly different from all wage and salary workers at the 95-percent confidence level.

<sup>3</sup>Significantly different from full-time wage and salary workers at the 95-percent confidence level.

\*Significantly different from percentages in 2000 at the 95-percent confidence level.

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

Table 4

**Family income of hired farmworkers by race/ethnic group and citizenship status, 2001<sup>1</sup>***Hispanic hired farmworkers and those who are not U.S. citizens have lower family incomes*

Item	Annual averages					
	All workers	Race/ethnic group			Citizenship status	
		White	Hispanic	Black and other	U.S. citizen	Not U.S. citizen
-----Thousands-----						
Total workers	745	366	341	38	477	268
-----Percent-----						
Family income:						
Less than \$10,000	21.8	18.6	24.7	--	18.8	27.0 <sup>4</sup>
\$10,000-\$19,999	19.8	14.0 <sup>2</sup>	25.8 <sup>3</sup>	--	16.6	25.5 <sup>4</sup>
\$20,000-\$29,999	20.7	15.8 <sup>2</sup>	26.4 <sup>3</sup>	--	18.2 <sup>2</sup>	25.1
\$30,000-\$39,999	13.2	13.7	13.3	--	12.4	14.8
\$40,000-\$49,999	6.7	9.5	3.7 <sup>3</sup>	--	9.0	2.82 <sup>4</sup>
\$50,000 or more	17.8	28.4 <sup>2</sup>	6.12 <sup>3</sup>	--	25.0 <sup>2</sup>	4.82 <sup>4</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 and older.

-- Percentages not shown where base is less than 50,000.

<sup>2</sup>Significantly different from all hired farmworkers at the 95-percent confidence level.

<sup>3</sup>Significantly different from white workers at the 95-percent confidence level.

<sup>4</sup>Significantly different from U.S. citizens at the 95-percent confidence level.

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

Table 5

**Demographic characteristics of hired farmworkers and wage/salary workers, 2001**

*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	745	100	120,836	100
<b>Gender:</b>				
Male	601	80.7*	62,734	51.9
Female	144	19.3*	58,102	48.1
<b>Racial/ethnic group:</b>				
White	366	49.1*	87,289	72.3
Hispanic	341	45.7*	13,815	11.4
Black and others	38	5.1*	19,732	16.3
<b>Age:</b>				
Less than 20	109	14.6*	7,116	5.9
20-24	87	11.7	12,994	10.8
25-34	171	23.0	28,664	22.9
35-44	189	25.3	32,079	26.6
45-54	108	14.5*	25,417	21.8
55 and over	81	10.9	14,566	12.0
<b>Median age (years)</b>		35*		39
<b>Marital status:</b>				
Married	410	55.1	67,821	56.1
Widowed, divorced, or separated	62	8.3*	17,605	14.6
Never married	273	36.6*	35,409	29.3
<b>Schooling completed:</b>				
0-4 years	79	10.6*	899	0.8
5-8 years	158	21.2*	3,191	2.6
5-11 years	174	23.3*	11,374	9.4
12 years <sup>1</sup>	203	27.3	37,195	30.8
13 or more years	131	17.6*	68,176	56.4
<b>Citizenship status:</b>				
U.S. citizen	477	64.0*	111,031	91.9
Not U.S. citizen	268	36.0*	9,804	8.1
<b>Employment status:</b>				
Full-time	601	80.7	99,600	82.4
Part-time	144	19.3	21,235	17.6

<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.

Table 6

**Demographic and earnings characteristics of hired farmworkers, 1990-2001***Although the number of hired farmworkers and their earnings have fluctuated, most demographic characteristics have remained stable*

Characteristic	Annual averages											
	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
	<i>Thousands</i>											
Number of workers	886	884	848	803	793	849	906	889	875	840	878	745
	<i>Percent</i>											
<b>Gender:</b>												
Male	82.9	82.4	83.8	84.7	83.7	84.5	84.2	83.3	83.8	80.7	82.1	80.7
Female	17.1	17.6	16.2	15.3	16.3	15.5	15.8	16.7	16.2	19.3	17.9	19.3
<b>Racial/ethnic group:</b>												
White	61.0	60.3	59.7	57.5	51.3	53.5	58.9	52.4	52.4	50.1	47.2	49.1
Hispanic	29.4	28.3	30.7	33.6	41.3	41.1	36.0	41.0	41.8	43.0	46.4	45.7
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	5.1
<b>Age:</b>												
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	26.2
25-44	47.6	51.6	52.6	51.1	48.8	44.2	46.0	45.6	46.7	44.0	46.9	48.4
45-59	14.4	15.1	16.3	16.2	17.2	18.2	19.1	17.1	17.8	18.8	19.6	19.9
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	5.5
Median age (years)	28	30	30	29	32	32	34	33	33	33	35	35
<b>Marital status:</b>												
Married	53.3	53.4	53.5	51.8	58.5	58.5	56.3	52.1	51.9	55.5	55.0	55.1
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	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	36.6
<b>Schooling completed:</b>												
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	10.6
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	21.2
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	23.3
12 years <sup>1</sup>	31.4	31.0	26.9	27.0	25.9	25.9	25.4	22.3	26.5	27.1	25.7	27.3
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	17.6
<b>Employment status:</b>												
Part-time	21.8	22.8	21.1	22.9	20.1	18.3	22.4	18.5	18.6	20.5	19.3	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	80.7
	<i>Dollars</i>											
<b>Median weekly earnings:<sup>3</sup></b>												
Full-time workers <sup>2</sup>	325	312	303	306	299	302	313	306	313	340	328	345
All workers	271	273	252	270	281	279	282	276	282	298	288	300

<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, and data for 2000 and later years are not directly comparable with data for 1999 and earlier years because of changes in survey design.

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

Table 7

**Demographic and earnings characteristics of wage and salary workers, 1990-2001***The demographic characteristics of all wage and salary workers have remained relatively unchanged*

Characteristic	Annual averages											
	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
	<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	120,836
	<i>Percent</i>											
<b>Gender:</b>												
Male	52.7	52.5	52.2	52.1	52.4	52.4	52.2	52.2	52.2	52.0	52.0	51.9
Female	47.3	47.5	47.8	47.9	47.6	47.6	47.8	47.8	47.8	48.0	48.0	48.1
<b>Racial/ethnic group:</b>												
White	78.3	78.1	77.9	77.7	76.3	76.2	75.0	74.0	73.4	73.1	72.4	72.3
Hispanic	7.9	8.0	8.0	8.2	9.3	9.5	9.7	10.4	10.6	10.8	11.3	11.4
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	16.3
<b>Age:</b>												
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	16.6
25-44	56.5	55.4	55.2	54.7	54.3	53.9	53.8	53.0	52.1	51.2	50.2	49.5
45-59	21.8	21.7	22.5	23.2	23.4	24.0	24.7	25.4	25.9	26.6	27.2	28.1
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	5.8
Median age (years)	33	34	34	34	36	37	37	37	38	38	38	39
<b>Marital status:</b>												
Married	58.2	58.5	58.3	58.2	57.9	58.0	58.0	57.0	56.4	56.2	55.9	56.1
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	14.6
Never married	27.5	27.2	27.2	27.1	27.6	27.6	27.5	28.4	28.9	29.2	29.4	29.3
<b>Schooling completed:</b>												
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	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	2.6
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	9.4
12 years <sup>1</sup>	39.4	39.2	35.0	34.4	33.3	32.7	32.4	32.4	31.8	31.6	31.2	30.8
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	56.4
<b>Employment status:</b>												
Part-time	18.4	19.6	19.9	19.9	20.3	19.0	18.9	18.4	18.2	18.0	17.4	17.6
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	82.4
	<i>Dollars</i>											
<b>Median weekly earnings:<sup>3</sup></b>												
Full-time workers <sup>2</sup>	549	557	557	558	552	558	543	552	565	585	592	596
All workers	488	481	480	490	478	465	468	478	494	509	514	510

<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, and data for 2000 and later years are not directly comparable with data for 1999 and earlier years because of changes in survey design.

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