

Grocery Stores

(NAICS 4451)

SIGNIFICANT POINTS

- Numerous job openings—many of them part time and relatively low paying—should be available due to the industry's large size and high rate of turnover.
- Many grocery store workers are young, with persons 16 to 24 years old holding 30 percent of the jobs.
- Cashiers and stock clerks and order fillers account for nearly one-half of all jobs.
- College graduates will fill most new management positions.

Nature of the Industry

Grocery stores, also known as supermarkets, are familiar to everyone. They sell an array of fresh and preserved foods, primarily for preparation and consumption at home. They also often sell prepared food, such as hot entrees or salads, for takeout meals. Stores range in size from supermarkets, which may employ hundreds of workers and sell numerous food and nonfood items, to convenience stores with small staffs and limited selections. However, convenience stores often sell fuel, including gasoline, diesel fuel, kerosene, and propane. Recently, many convenience stores have expanded their scope of services by providing automatic teller machines, money orders, and a more comprehensive selection of food and nonfood products. (Specialty grocery stores—meat and fish markets; fruit and vegetables markets; candy, nut, and confectionery stores; dairy products stores; retail bakeries; and health and dietetic food stores, for example—are not covered in this section. Also excluded are food services and drinking places that sell food and beverages for consumption on the premises. The latter are discussed elsewhere in the *Career Guide*.)

Grocery stores are found everywhere, although the size of the establishment and the range of goods and services offered vary. Traditionally, inner-city stores are small and offer a limited selection, although larger stores are now being built in many urban areas; suburban stores tend to be large supermarkets with a more diverse stock. Many supermarkets include several specialty departments that offer the products and services of seafood stores, bakeries, delicatessens, pharmacies, or florist shops. Household goods, health and beauty care items, automotive supplies, pet products, greeting cards, and clothing also are among the growing range of nonfood items sold. Some of the largest supermarkets even house cafeterias or food courts, and a few feature convenience stores. In addition, grocery stores may offer basic banking services and automatic teller machines, postal services, onsite film processing, drycleaning, video rentals, and catering services.

Working Conditions

Working conditions in most grocery stores are pleasant, with clean, well-lighted, climate-controlled surroundings. Work can be hectic, and dealing with customers can be stressful.

Grocery stores are open more hours and days than most work establishments, so workers are needed for early morning, late night, weekend, and holiday work. With employees working 30 hours a week, on average, these jobs are particularly attractive to workers who have family or school responsibilities or another job.

Most grocery store workers wear some sort of clothing, such as a jacket or apron, that identifies them as store employees and keeps their personal clothing clean. Health and safety regulations require some workers, such as those who work in the delicatessen or meat department, to wear head coverings, safety glasses, or gloves.

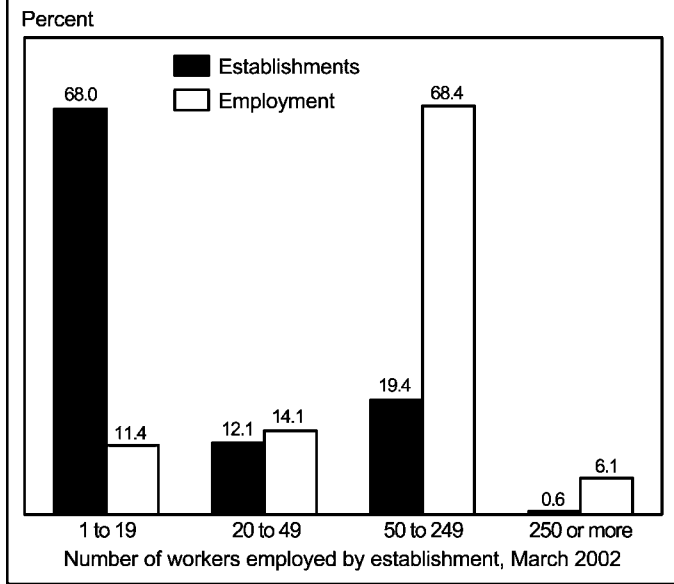
In 2002, cases of work-related injury and illness averaged 7.3 per 100 full-time workers in grocery stores, compared with 5.3 per 100 full-time workers in the entire private sector. Some injuries occur while workers transport or stock goods. Persons in food processing occupations, such as butchers and meatcutters, as well as cashiers working with computer scanners or traditional cash registers, may be vulnerable to cumulative trauma and other repetitive motion injuries.

Employment

Grocery stores ranked among the largest industries in 2002, providing 2.5 million wage and salary jobs. About 30 percent of all grocery store employees worked part time, and the average workweek of nonsupervisory workers was 30 hours. Some self-employed workers also worked in grocery stores, mostly in smaller establishments.

In 2002, there were about 86,000 grocery stores throughout the Nation. Most grocery stores are small; about two-thirds employ fewer than 20 workers. Most jobs, however, are found in the largest stores. About three-quarters of workers were employed in grocery stores with more than 50 workers (see chart).

About 75 percent of the jobs in grocery stores are in establishments employing 50 or more workers



Many grocery store workers are young, with persons 16 to 24 years old holding 30 percent of the jobs. This reflects the large number of jobs in this industry open to young workers who have little or no work experience.

Occupations in the Industry

Grocery store workers stock shelves on the sales floor; prepare food and other goods; assist customers in locating, purchasing, and understanding the content and uses of various items; and provide support services to the establishment. If the store is part of a chain, many important tasks—such as marketing and promotion, inventory control and management, and financing—are done at a centralized corporate headquarters. However, 49 percent of all grocery store employees are cashiers or stock clerks and order fillers.

Cashiers make up the largest occupation in grocery stores, accounting for about one-third of all workers (table 1). They scan the items being purchased by customers, total the amount due, accept payment, make change, fill out charge forms, and produce a cash register receipt that shows the quantity and price of the items. In most supermarkets, the cashier passes the universal product code on the item’s label across a computer scanner that identifies the item and its price, which is automatically relayed to the cash register. In some grocery stores, customers themselves scan and bag their purchases, and pay using an automatic payment terminal, a system known as self-checkout. Cashiers verify that the items have been paid for before the customer leaves. In other grocery stores, the cashier reads a hand-stamped price on the item and keys that price directly into the cash register. Cashiers then place items in bags for customers; accept cash, personal check, credit card, or electronic debit card payments; and make change. When cashiers are not needed to check out customers, they sometimes assist other workers.

Stock clerks and order fillers are the second largest occupation in grocery stores, accounting for 17 percent of workers. They fill the shelves with merchandise and arrange displays to

attract customers. In stores without computer scanning equipment, stock clerks and order fillers may have to manually mark prices on individual items and count stock for inventory control.

Many office clerical workers—such as *secretaries and administrative assistants; general office clerks; and bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks*—prepare and maintain the records necessary to keep grocery stores running smoothly.

Butchers and other meat, poultry, and fish processing workers prepare meat, poultry, and fish for purchase by cutting up and trimming carcasses and large sections into smaller pieces, which they package, weigh, price, and place on display. They also prepare ground meat from other cuts and fill customers’ special orders. These workers also may prepare ready-to-heat foods by filleting or cutting meat, poultry, or fish into bite-sized pieces, preparing and adding vegetables, or applying sauces or breading. Butchers and other meat, poultry, and fish processing

Table 1. Employment of wage and salary workers in grocery stores by occupation, 2002 and projected change, 2002-12. (Employment in thousands)

Occupation	Employment, 2002		Percent change, 2002-12
	Number	Percent	
All occupations	2,478	100.0	5.4
Management, business, and financial occupations	65	2.6	8.7
Top executives	40	1.6	7.5
Professional and related occupations	45	1.8	46.0
Service occupations	317	12.8	16.1
First-line supervisors/managers of food preparation and serving workers	25	1.0	20.1
Food preparation workers	111	4.5	26.6
Food and beverage serving workers	124	5.0	10.4
Sales and related occupations	1,023	41.3	7.9
First-line supervisors/managers of retail sales workers	136	5.5	7.6
Cashiers	807	32.6	8.1
Retail salespersons	44	1.8	3.4
Office and administrative support occupations	550	22.2	-4.7
Financial clerks	25	1.0	-5.1
Customer service representatives	43	1.7	10.4
Stock clerks and order fillers	411	16.6	-6.3
Production occupations	176	7.1	-0.9
Bakers	45	1.8	10.4
Butchers and meat cutters	87	3.5	-11.7
Transportation and material moving occupations	293	11.8	0.4
Laborers and freight, stock, and material movers, hand	33	1.4	-11.4
Packers and packagers, hand	239	9.6	1.5

NOTE: May not add to totals due to omission of occupations with small employment.

workers often work from a central facility, from which smaller packages are sent to area stores.

Some specialty workers prepare food for sale in the grocery store and work in kitchens that may not be located in the store. *Bakers* produce breads, rolls, cakes, cookies, and other baked goods. *Chefs and head cooks* direct the preparation, seasoning, and cooking of salads, soups, fish, meats, vegetables, desserts, or other foods. Some plan and price menu items, order supplies, and keep records and accounts. *Cooks and food preparation workers* make salads—such as coleslaw or potato, macaroni, or chicken salad—and other entrees, and prepare ready-to-heat foods—such as burritos, marinated chicken breasts, or chicken stir-fry—for sale in the delicatessen or in the gourmet food or meat department. Other food preparation workers arrange party platters or prepare various vegetables and fruits that are sold at the salad bar.

Demonstrators and product promoters may offer samples of various products to entice customers to purchase them.

In supermarkets that serve food and beverages for consumption on the premises, *food and beverage serving workers* take orders and serve customers at counters. They may prepare short-order items, such as salads or sandwiches, to be taken out and consumed elsewhere. *Building cleaning workers* keep the stores clean and orderly.

In the warehouses and stockrooms of large supermarkets, *hand laborers and freight, stock, and material movers* move stock and goods in storage and deliver them to the sales floor; they also help load and unload delivery trucks. *Hand packers and packagers*, also known as courtesy clerks or baggers, perform a variety of simple tasks, such as bagging groceries, loading parcels in customers' cars, and returning unpurchased merchandise from the checkout counter to shelves.

First-line managers of retail sales workers supervise mostly entry-level employees at the grocery, produce, meat, and other specialty departments. These managers train employees and schedule their hours; oversee ordering, inspection, pricing, and inventory of goods; monitor sales activity; and make reports to store managers. *General and operations managers* are responsible for the efficient and profitable operation of grocery stores. Working through their department managers, general and operations managers may set store policy, hire and train employees, develop merchandising plans, maintain good customer and community relations, address customer complaints, and monitor the store's profits or losses.

Purchasing managers plan and direct the task of purchasing goods for resale to consumers. Purchasing managers must thoroughly understand grocery store foods, other items, and each store's customers. They must select the best suppliers and maintain good relationships with them. Purchasing managers evaluate their store's sales reports to determine what products are in demand and plan purchases according to their budget.

Because of the expansion of the industry to meet the consumers' desire for "one-stop shopping," grocery stores have begun to employ an array of workers to help meet that need. For example, *marketing and sales managers* forecast sales and develop a marketing plan based on demographic trends, sales data, community needs, and consumer feedback. *Pharmacists* fill cus-

tomers' drug prescriptions and advise them on over-the-counter medicines. *Inspectors, testers, sorters, samplers, and weighers* assess whether products and facilities meet quality, health, and safety standards. *Human resources, training, and labor relations specialists* are responsible for making sure that employees maintain and, if necessary, improve their skill levels.

Training and Advancement

Most grocery store jobs are entry-level and can be learned in a short time. Employers generally prefer high school graduates for occupations such as cashier, stock clerk and order filler, or food preparation workers. In large supermarket chains, prospective employees are matched with available jobs, hours, and locations and are sent to a specific store for on-the-job training. Many cashiers are trained in a few days, with some stores offering formal classroom training to familiarize workers with the equipment with which they will work. Meatcutters and bakers are more skilled. Trade schools and industry associations offer training for these jobs, but the skills also can be learned on the job.

College graduates will fill most new management positions. Employers increasingly seek graduates of college and university, junior and community college, and technical institute programs in food marketing, food management, and supermarket management. Many supermarket chains place graduates of these programs, or of bachelor's or master's degree programs in business administration, in various professional positions or management training programs in areas such as logistics, supply chain, marketing, replenishment, food safety, human resources, and strategic planning. Management trainees start as assistant or department managers and, depending on experience and performance, may advance to positions of greater responsibility. It is not unusual for managers to supervise a large number of employees early in their careers.

Courtesy clerks sometimes advance to work as service clerks in the delicatessen or bakery, stock clerks and order fillers, or perhaps cashiers. Sometimes, workers rotate assignments in a supermarket; for example, a cashier might occasionally wrap meat. Union contracts, however, may have strict occupational definitions in some stores, making movement among departments difficult.

Entry-level workers may advance to management positions, depending on experience and performance. Grocery store management has become increasingly complex and technical. Managers of some large supermarkets are responsible for millions of dollars in yearly revenue and for hundreds of employees. They use computers to manage budgets, schedule work, track and order products, price goods, manage shelf space, and assess product profitability. Many stores that promote from within have established tracks by which workers move from department to department, gaining broad experience, until they are considered ready for an entry-level management position. Opportunities for advancement to management jobs exist in both large supermarket chains and in small, independent grocery stores.

Grocery store jobs call for various personal attributes. Almost all workers must be in good physical condition. Because managers, cashiers, stock clerks and order fillers, and other workers on the sales floor constantly deal with the public, a neat

appearance and a pleasant, businesslike manner are important. Cashiers and stock clerks and order fillers must be able to do repetitious work accurately while under pressure. Cashiers need basic arithmetic skills, good hand-eye coordination, and manual dexterity. Stock clerks and order fillers, especially, must be in good physical condition because of the lifting, crouching, and climbing that they do. For managers, good communication skills and the ability to solve problems quickly, and to perform well under pressure are important. In addition, personal qualities such as initiative, the ability to focus on detail, and leadership ability are essential for managers.

Earnings

Average weekly earnings in grocery stores are considerably lower than the average for all industries, reflecting the large proportion of entry-level, part-time jobs. In 2002, nonsupervisory workers in grocery stores averaged \$335 a week, compared with \$506 a week for all workers in the private sector. Earnings in selected occupations in grocery stores appear in table 2.

Managers receive a salary, and often a bonus based on store or department performance. Managers in highly profitable stores generally earn more than those in less profitable stores.

Full-time workers generally receive typical benefits, such as paid vacations, sick leave, and health and life insurance. Part-time workers who are not unionized may receive few benefits. Unionized part-time workers sometimes receive partial benefits. Grocery store employees may receive a discount on purchases.

About 22 percent of all employees in grocery stores belong to a union or are covered by union contracts, compared with about 15 percent in all industries. Workers in chain stores are more likely to be unionized or covered by contracts than are workers in independent grocery stores. In independent stores, wages often are determined by job title, and increases are tied to length of job service and to job performance. The United Food and Commercial Workers International Union is the primary union representing grocery store workers.

Outlook

Employment in grocery stores is expected to increase about 5 percent by the year 2012, compared with the 16-percent growth projected for all industries combined. Many additional job openings will arise from the need to replace workers who transfer to jobs in other industries, retire, or stop working for other reasons. Replacement needs are particularly significant due to the industry's large size and the high rate of turnover among cashiers and other workers who do not choose to pursue grocery industry careers.

Employment will grow as the population increases and as more grocery stores offer a wider array of goods and services that include prescription drugs, dry cleaning, film developing, flowers, liquor, and carryout food, as well as banking, postal, and catering services. Grocery stores are adding and enhancing delicatessens, bakeries, and meat and seafood departments to counter the trend toward eating away from home, as well as adding ready-to-eat-meals to compete with fast-food restaurants. The trend toward opening "supercenters," where a myriad of products and services are available at a single location, is increasingly popular. These expansions are expected to create many new jobs.

Table 2. Median hourly earnings of the largest occupations in grocery stores, 2002

Occupation	Grocery stores	All industries
General and operations managers	\$23.89	\$32.80
First-line supervisors/managers of retail sales workers	14.39	14.28
First-line supervisors/managers of food preparation and serving workers	13.81	11.73
Butchers and meat cutters	13.09	12.26
Bakers	9.84	9.89
Retail salespersons	8.96	8.51
Stock clerks and order fillers	8.58	9.26
Food preparation workers	8.43	7.85
Customer service representatives	8.29	12.62
Combined food preparation and serving workers, including fast food	8.14	6.97
Laborers and freight, stock, and material movers, hand	8.11	9.48
Cashiers	7.57	7.41
Packers and packagers, hand	6.97	8.03

Some technological advances—such as computer scanning cash registers and automated warehouse equipment—have boosted productivity, but these innovations are not expected to adversely affect employment levels. In fact, past technological improvements like scanners and electronic data interchange are expected to improve opportunities in areas such as category management and distribution. Increasing competition from large discount department stores will encourage the industry to continue to improve its efficiency by adopting new technologies and procedures and by eliminating redundancies, especially in the supply chains. Increasingly, many stores let customers process their own transactions with almost no interaction with a cashier. The growing use of self-checkout machines at grocery stores may have a slightly adverse effect on employment of cashiers. This trend, however, will depend largely on the public's acceptance of automated checkouts. On the other hand, many other tasks, such as stocking shelves on the sales floor or helping a customer find a product, cannot be performed effectively by machines. In addition, many consumers have demonstrated their strong desire for personal services. For example, consumers want managers to answer questions about store policy and services; they want cashiers and courtesy clerks to answer questions, bag goods, or help them bring groceries to their cars; and they want workers in specialty departments to advise them on their purchases and fill personal orders by providing special cuts of meat, fish, or poultry.

Projected growth for some grocery store occupations differs from the 5-percent growth projected for the industry as a whole. For example, employment of bakers and food preparation and serving related occupations is expected to grow faster than the industry because of the popularity of freshly baked breads and pastries, carryout food, and catering services. On the other hand, employment of butchers and other meat, poultry, and fish processing workers is expected to grow more slowly than the industry as more meatcutting, processing, and packaging shifts from the retail store to the manufacturing plant.

Electronic shopping currently is gaining in popularity across the country. Its impact on industry employment could be signifi-

cant within the near future, depending on how fast consumers adopt the new technology. Growth of online grocery shopping, however, may be tempered by several factors, including logistical complications, particularly in rural areas, and the expense of delivering perishable goods in a timely manner.

Unlike many other industries, the grocery industry is not highly sensitive to changes in economic conditions. Even during periods of recession, demand for food is likely to remain relatively stable.

Sources of Additional Information

For information on job opportunities in grocery stores, contact individual stores or the local office of the State employment service.

General information on careers in grocery stores is available from:

- United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, Education Office, 1775 K St. NW., Washington, DC 20006-1502.
- Food Marketing Institute, 655 15th St. NW., Suite 700, Washington, DC 20005. Internet: <http://www.fmi.org>
- National Association of Convenience Stores, 1605 King St., Alexandria, VA 22314.
- International Foodservice Distributors Association, 201 Park Washington Court, Falls Church, VA 22046-4521.

Information on most occupations in grocery stores, including the following, appears in the 2004-05 *Occupational Outlook Handbook*:

- Advertising, marketing, promotions, public relations, and sales managers
- Building cleaning workers
- Cashiers
- Chefs, cooks, and food preparation workers
- Demonstrators, product promoters, and models
- Food and beverage serving and related workers
- Food processing occupations
- Food service managers
- Human resources, training, and labor relations managers and specialists
- Material-moving occupations
- Pharmacists
- Pharmacy aides
- Pharmacy technicians
- Purchasing managers, buyers, and purchasing agents
- Retail salespersons
- Sales worker supervisors
- Stock clerks and order fillers