



Food Justice: Food Service Workers

In 2014, Food Day has a special focus on issues related to food justice. We envision food that is healthy, affordable, and produced with care for the environment, farm animals, and the people who grow, harvest, and serve it.

The Facts:

- The federal “tipped” (for workers who receive tips) minimum wage is only \$2.13 per hour,¹ and has been frozen at that low rate for the past 20 years. It is less than 30 percent of the regular minimum wage (\$7.25 per hour).²
- Almost 90 percent of restaurant workers lack even a single paid sick day to recover from short-term illnesses like the common cold. As a result, two-thirds of restaurant workers say they’ve cooked, prepared, or served food while sick.³
- On the list of the ten lowest-paid occupations in the country, seven are in the restaurant industry. Three of these are tipped occupations: counter attendants; servers; and bussers, runners, and bartender assistants.⁴
- The poverty rate amongst tipped restaurant workers is 21 percent, three times the rate of poverty compared to the country’s workforce in general.⁵
- Nearly one-fourth of food service workers live in food insecure households, 13.2 percent live in households that use food stamps (SNAP), 6.1 percent in households that receive WIC benefits, and 14 percent have at least one child receiving free school lunch as part of the National School Lunch Program.⁶
- Nearly one-third of food service workers are at risk for diet-related diseases like diabetes, stroke, and heart disease, the highest rate of any occupation in the country.⁷ Fortunately, groups like Restaurant Opportunities Centers United (ROC) are organizing and agitating to educate the public and improve working conditions for restaurant workers.
- In 2010, university food service programs had an estimated operating profit of \$1 billion. Food workers represent only 0.6% of total wage costs for U.S. colleges and universities.⁸



1 U.S. Department of Labor. <http://www.dol.gov/elaws/faq/esa/flsa/002.htm>. Accessed 3/28/14.

2 U.S. Department of Labor. <http://www.dol.gov/whd/minimumwage.htm>. Accessed 3/28/14.

3 Restaurant Opportunities Centers United. http://rocunited.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/reports_serving-while-sick_full.pdf. Accessed 3/28/14.

4 U.S. Department of Labor. http://www.bls.gov/oes/2011/may/oes_nat.htm. Accessed 3/28/14.

5 American Community Survey (ACS). Calculations by the Restaurant Opportunities Centers United of civilian employed population based on Ruggles et al., Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 5.0, 2010.

6 2010 Census Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Survey.

7 Davila, E.P. et al. *Diabetes Care*. 33 (11) 2390-2395 (2010).

8 Real Food. Real Jobs. <http://www.realfoodrealjobs.org/problems/>. Accessed 3/28/14.