

**Profile of Hired Farmworkers, 1998 Annual Averages.** By Jack L. Runyan.  
Food and Rural Economics Division, Economic Research Service, U.S.  
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## **Abstract**

An average of 875,000 persons 15 years of age and older did hired farmwork each week as their primary job in 1998. An additional 63,000 people did hired farmwork each week as their secondary job. Hired farmworkers were more likely than the typical U.S. wage and salary worker to be male, Hispanic, younger, less educated, never married, and not U.S. citizens. The West (42 percent) and South (31.4 percent) census regions accounted for almost three-fourths of the hired farmworkers. The rate of unemployment in the hired farm labor force (11.8 percent) was more than double that (4.5 percent) for all wage and salary workers. Hired farmworkers were also more likely to be paid less than the minimum wage, and to be low-wage workers. Consequently, their median weekly earnings continued to be much lower than those of all wage and salary workers. However, hired farmworkers' real median weekly earnings increased 4 percent between 1990 and 1998, while earnings for all wage and salary workers increased only 2 percent. This report examines regional and structural patterns of farm labor use, and demographic and employment characteristics of hired farmworkers, using data from the 1997 Census of Agriculture and the 1998 Current Population Survey (CPS) earnings microdata file.

**Keywords:** Hired farmworkers, annual averages, demographic characteristics, hours worked, median weekly earnings.

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## Summary

Hired farmworkers are an important part of agricultural production, accounting for about 30 percent of all farmworkers. Although important to agriculture, hired farmworkers continue to be one of the most disadvantaged groups in the United States. Approximately 875,000 people 15 years and older worked as farmworkers as their primary job each week in 1998. Almost 19 percent were employed part-time (less than 35 hours per week), and over a third were not U.S. citizens. Hired farmworkers had one of the lowest median weekly earnings and one of the largest percentages (50 percent) of workers with family incomes less than \$20,000 in 1998. This report, using data from the 1997 Census of Agriculture and the 1998 Current Population Survey earnings microdata file, presents information on the patterns of farm labor use and the demographic and employment characteristics of hired farmworkers to help inform the policy debate about the effects of proposed and changing legislation on the Nation's farmworkers.

More specific findings of this study are:

- Hired farmworkers were more likely than all wage and salary workers to be male, Hispanic, younger, less educated, never married, and not U.S. citizens. About 57 percent of hired farmworkers completed less than the 12th grade, in contrast to 14 percent of all wage and salary workers.
- An additional 63,000 people were employed as farmworkers for their secondary job each week. Most of these workers were employed in agricultural services (establishments that provide workers to farm employers for a fee).
- Almost 19 percent of the hired farm workforce were employed part-time (less than 35 hours per week) in 1998. These part-time workers were more likely than full-time hired farmworkers to be female, white, younger, never married, and U.S. citizens. More than half were employed in livestock production.
- In 1998, about 75 percent of hired farmworkers were employed in the South and West. Only 7 percent were employed in the Northeast. The Midwest and Northeast reported a higher percentage of white and lower percentage of Hispanic laborers. The South reported more black and other workers, and the West reported more Hispanic farmworkers than other regions.
- Over a third (34 percent) of farmworkers were not U.S. citizens. Almost 95 percent of these workers were Hispanic, and nearly three-quarters were employed in crop production and located in the West region.
- Males, white and black and other workers, workers 25–55 years old, workers with a 12th grade or higher education, and those employed in livestock all had higher median weekly earnings than all hired farmworkers. Hired farmworkers in the West region also had higher median weekly earnings.

- Hired farmworkers continue to experience lower wages and higher unemployment than all wage and salary workers. In 1998, the median weekly earnings of hired farmworkers were \$260, an increase of 4 percent (after adjusting for inflation) since 1990. During the same time period, median weekly earnings of all U.S. wage and salary workers increased 2 percent in real terms. Half of the hired farmworkers had family incomes amounting to less than \$20,000 in 1998. Unemployment among the hired farm labor force was 11.8 percent, compared with 4.5 percent for the total wage and salary labor force.