

Minority Hired Farmworkers Earn About the Same as Their Nonminority Counterparts

Minority workers have become almost one-half of the hired farmworkers in the United States. They are more likely than White farmworkers to be male, older, married, less educated, employed in crop production, and to experience wider fluctuations in employment during the year. Unlike all minority wage and salary workers' earnings, minority hired farmworkers' earnings do not differ from those of White workers.

Hired farmworkers, although less than 1 percent of all wage and salary workers, are over 30 percent of the production-agricultural work force (operators and unpaid family members account for the other 70 percent). They provide the labor at critical production times when labor demand exceeds what can be supplied by farm operators and their family members.

An annual average of 889,000 persons, including 424,000 minority workers age 15 and over, did hired farmwork each week as their primary employment during 1997, according to data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) earnings microdata file. Hired farmworkers include persons who reported their primary employment during the week as farm managers (9 percent), supervisors of farmworkers (4 percent), nursery workers (3 percent), and farmworkers engaged in planting, cultivating, and harvesting crops or attending to livestock (84 percent). Some of these hired farmworkers (9 percent) work in jobs in agricultural services (establishments primarily engaged in performing farm labor and management services, soil preparation services, and animal and crop services for others on a contract or fee basis).

The average weekly number of hired farmworkers in 1997 (889,000) was statistically unchanged from 1996. However, the number of hired farmworkers in 1997 was one of the highest during the 1990's.

Minorities Account for Nearly Half of Hired Farmworkers

Over the past 40 years, minority workers have increased from about 30 percent to about 50 percent of the hired farm work force. In 1997, 424,000, or 48 percent, of the hired farmworkers were minority workers (41 percent Hispanic and 7 percent Black and other), compared with 29,813,000, or 26 percent, of all wage and salary workers (10 percent Hispanic and 16 percent Black and other). All wage and salary workers include hired farmworkers. The number and percentage of hired farmworkers who belong to a minority have remained fairly constant since 1994 (the year that the CPS was changed). The percentage of minority workers among all wage and salary workers has increased each year since 1994.

Minority hired farmworkers are more likely than White hired farmworkers to be male, older, married, and less educated (table 1). Similar results, except for age and marital status, are shown for all wage and salary workers (table 2).

Most minority hired farmworkers (64 percent) are employed in crop production. Almost 96 percent of them are located in the South and West census regions, compared with 71 percent of all wage and salary workers. They work predominantly as farmworkers and nursery workers (92 percent, compared with 87 percent for all hired farmworkers), and a few work as supervisors of farmworkers (5 percent) and managers (3 percent). Most White hired farmworkers (58 percent) are employed in livestock production in the Midwest and South census regions.

Farm employment fluctuates more throughout the year than nonfarm employment. In 1997, the number of hired farmworkers ranged from a low of about 589,000 in January to a high of 1,117,000 in July (a 90-percent increase), compared with all wage and salary workers where the range was from a low of about 111,390,000 in January to a high of 116,610,000 in July (a 5-percent increase). The range for minority hired farmworkers was from a low of 242,000 in December to a high of 582,000 in April, a difference of 340,000, or 141 percent (table 3). For White hired farmworkers, the range was from a low of 294,000 in January to a high of 590,000 in February, a difference of 295,000 or 100 percent (table 3).

Table 1

Demographic and earnings characteristics of hired farmworkers, by race and ethnicity, 1997*White hired farmworkers are better educated than their minority counterparts, but their earnings are similar*

Characteristics	All	White	Hispanic	Black and other	All minorities ¹
Thousands					
Number of workers	889	465	365	59	424
Percent					
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Gender:					
Male	83.3	80.0	86.9*	87.2	87.0*
Female	16.7	20.0	13.1*	12.8	13.0*
Age (years):					
Less than 20	15.9*	25.1	5.9*	5.5*	5.8*
20-24	14.8	14.9	15.2	10.9	14.6*
25-34	24.3	19.7	30.9*	19.1	29.3*
35-44	21.4	19.5	22.9	26.8	23.4*
45-54	12.8	9.5	14.7	27.8*	16.5*
55 and older	10.9	11.4	10.4	9.9	10.4
Years					
Median age	33*	29	34*	38*	35*
Percent					
Marital status:					
Married	52.1*	43.5	63.9*	46.4	61.5*
Widowed, divorced, or separated	8.5	10.0	6.2	10.2	6.8
Never married	39.5*	46.5	29.9*	43.3	31.7*
Schooling completed:					
0-4 years	12.2*	1.0	27.0*	9.2	24.6*
5-8 years	22.1*	7.6	40.5*	22.6*	37.9*
9-11 years	24.8*	30.9	16.1*	30.5	18.1*
12 years	22.3*	31.5	10.3*	23.7	12.2*
13 years or more	18.6*	28.9	6.1*	14.1*	7.2*
1997 dollars					
Median weekly earnings	250	240	252	250	250

Note: These characteristics are annual averages calculated from the 12 monthly Current Population Survey estimates.

*Significantly different from White workers at the 95-percent confidence level.

¹Combination of Hispanics, Blacks, and other.

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

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Table 2

Demographic and earnings characteristics of all wage and salary workers, by race and ethnicity, 1997

White and non-White workers differ in demographic and earnings characteristics

Characteristics	All	White	Hispanic	Black and other	All minorities ¹
Thousands					
Number of workers	114,697	84,884	11,896	17,917	29,813
Percent					
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Gender:					
Male	52.2	52.0	60.2*	48.0*	52.8*
Female	47.8	48.0	39.8*	52.0*	47.2*
Age (years):					
Less than 20	6.0*	6.3	6.1		5.3*
20-24	10.5*	9.8	14.9*	10.7*	12.4*
25-34	25.6*	24.1	32.2*	28.3*	29.8*
35-44	27.4	27.3	25.7*	29.0*	27.7*
45-54	19.7*	20.8	14.0*	18.4*	16.6*
55 and older	10.8	11.7	7.1*	8.8*	8.1*
Years					
Median age	37*	38	33*	36*	35*
Percent					
Marital status:					
Married	57.0*	59.4	56.4*	45.6*	49.9*
Widowed, divorced, or separated	14.6	14.5	11.9*	17.8*	15.0*
Never married	28.4*	26.2	31.7*	36.6*	34.6*
Schooling completed:					
0-4 years	.8*	.1	5.2*	.7*	2.5*
5-8 years	2.8*	1.3	14.9*	2.3*	7.3*
9-11 years	10.0*	8.6	18.2*	11.4*	14.1*
12 years	32.4	32.6	29.1*	33.6*	31.8*
13 years or more	54.0*	57.4	32.6*	52.0*	44.3*
1997 dollars					
Median weekly earnings	432*	471	320*	376*	350*

Note: These characteristics are annual averages calculated from the 12 monthly Current Population Survey estimates.

*Significantly different from White workers at the 95-percent confidence level.

¹Combination of Hispanics, Blacks, and other.

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

Table 3

Average number of hired farmworkers employed per month, by race and ethnicity, 1997*Monthly employment differs between White and minority workers*

Month	All	White	Hispanic	Black and other	All minorities ¹
Thousands					
January	589	294	244	50	294
February	985	590	359	36	395
March	942	493	371	78	449
April	1,048	466	549	33	582
May	885	454	346	85	431
June	1,107	569	499	39	538
July	1,117	574	492	51	543
August	923	510	356	57	413
September	880	386	345	149	494
October	711	366	316	29	345
November	798	443	310	45	355
December	679	437	191	51	242

¹Combination of Hispanics, Blacks, and other.

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

Unemployment Disproportionately Affects Minority Hired Farmworkers

The average weekly number of unemployed persons claiming hired farm work as their last primary occupation was about 106,000 in 1997. Hispanics, Blacks, and others accounted for 69 percent of these unemployed persons, a much greater percentage than their participation (50 percent) in the hired farm work labor pool. They also accounted for over 1 percent of all unemployed persons in 1997.

Minority Hired Farmworkers Earn the Same as All Hired Farmworkers

Unlike all wage and salary workers, the median weekly earnings of hired farmworkers did not differ significantly by race (tables 1 and 2). Although the median weekly wages for White hired farmworkers (\$240) were lower than most other occupations, the median weekly earnings of Hispanic and Black hired farmworkers (\$252 and \$250, respectively) did not differ statistically from those in several other occupations (fig. 1).

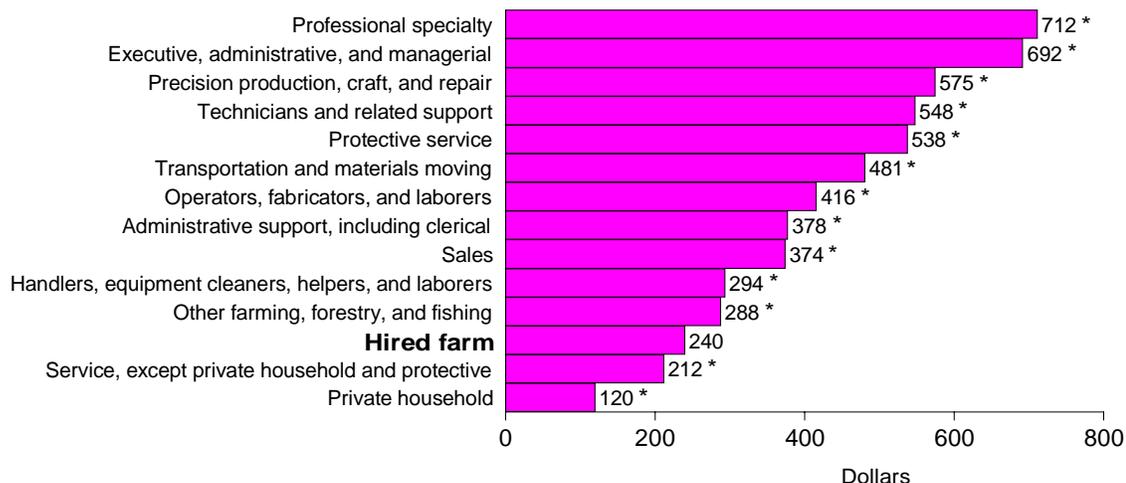
The median weekly earnings (in real dollars) for hired farmworkers did not change significantly between 1994 (\$258) and 1997 (\$250). Real median weekly earnings significantly increased between 1994 (\$458) and 1997 (\$471) only for White wage and salary workers. Therefore, all hired farmworkers and all minority wage and salary workers are no better off, in terms of median weekly earnings, in 1997 than they were in 1994. [Jack L. Runyan, 202-694-5438, jrunyan@econ.ag.gov]

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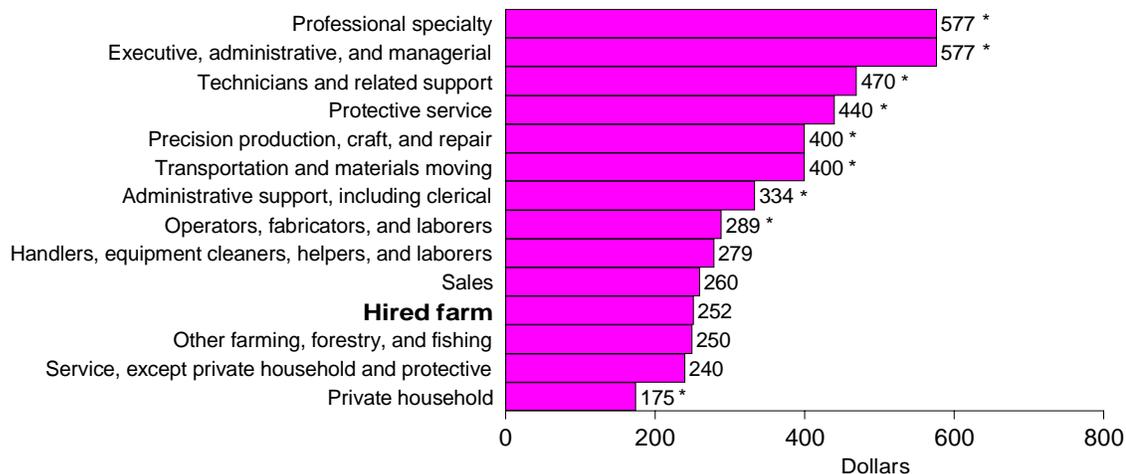
Figure 1

Median weekly earnings of wage and salary workers, by occupation, 1997

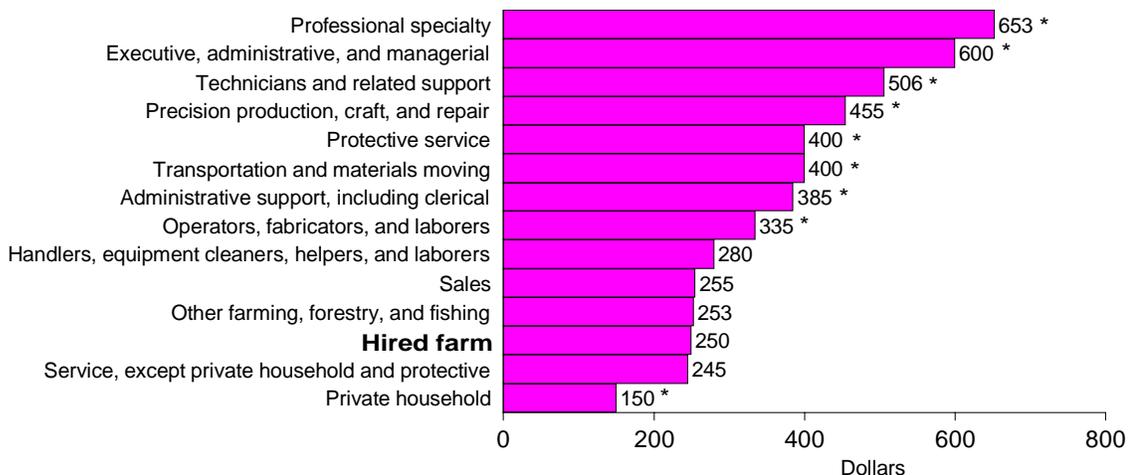
White hired farmworkers' earnings rank near the bottom of major occupational groups



Hispanic hired farmworkers' earnings rank near the bottom of major occupational groups, but are not significantly different from earnings of Hispanics in several other occupational groups



Black and other hired farmworkers' earnings, like Hispanics, are near the low end, but are not significantly different from earnings of Blacks and others in several other occupational groups



*Statistically significant at the 95-percent level from hired farmworkers' median weekly earnings.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the 1997 Current Population Survey earnings microdata file.