

Gallery Walk Handout

Instructions: Read the quotes and statistics posted for each food chain worker. Consider the risks and challenges of each job and list them in the second column below. When you are finished, think of one more food chain worker not mentioned in the activity and list any risks and challenges for that job as well. Be prepared to share your answers.

Job	Risks and Challenges
Crop worker	
Truck driver	
Meat processing worker	
Fast food worker	

Gallery Walk Sign 1

CROP WORKER

“She and the other three dozen Mexican immigrants in the field were bent at an almost 90-degree angle, using two hands to pack strawberries into plastic containers that they pushed along on ungainly one-wheeled carts.”¹

Photo Credit: Alex Proimos, 2012. Creative Commons CC BY 2.0

Gallery Walk Sign 2



**TRUCK
DRIVER**

“I get paid 40 cents a mile. I have days I turn in over 600 miles and days I turn in less than 200. ... A really good day on the job for me is lots of miles ... and being able to get to the truck stop early to find a spot and have a nice clean hot shower followed by a good meal. What makes it a really, really good day is if I am going to make it home that night after perhaps 12 to 19 days on the road.”

– Commercial truck driver²

Photo Credit: Alex Proimos, 2012. Creative Commons CC BY 2.0.

Gallery Walk Sign 3



MEAT PROCESSING WORKER

“The line is so fast there is no time to sharpen the knife. The knife gets dull and you have to cut harder. That’s when it really starts to hurt, and that’s when you cut yourself.”

– Pork packing plant line worker³

“They love you if you’re healthy ... If you get hurt, watch out. They will look for a way to get rid of you before they report it. They will find a reason to fire you, or put you on a worse job like in the cold room, or change your shift so you quit. So a lot of people don’t report their injuries. They just work with the pain.”

– Beef packing plant worker³

Photo Credit: Joe Valbuena, USDA.

Gallery Walk Sign 4

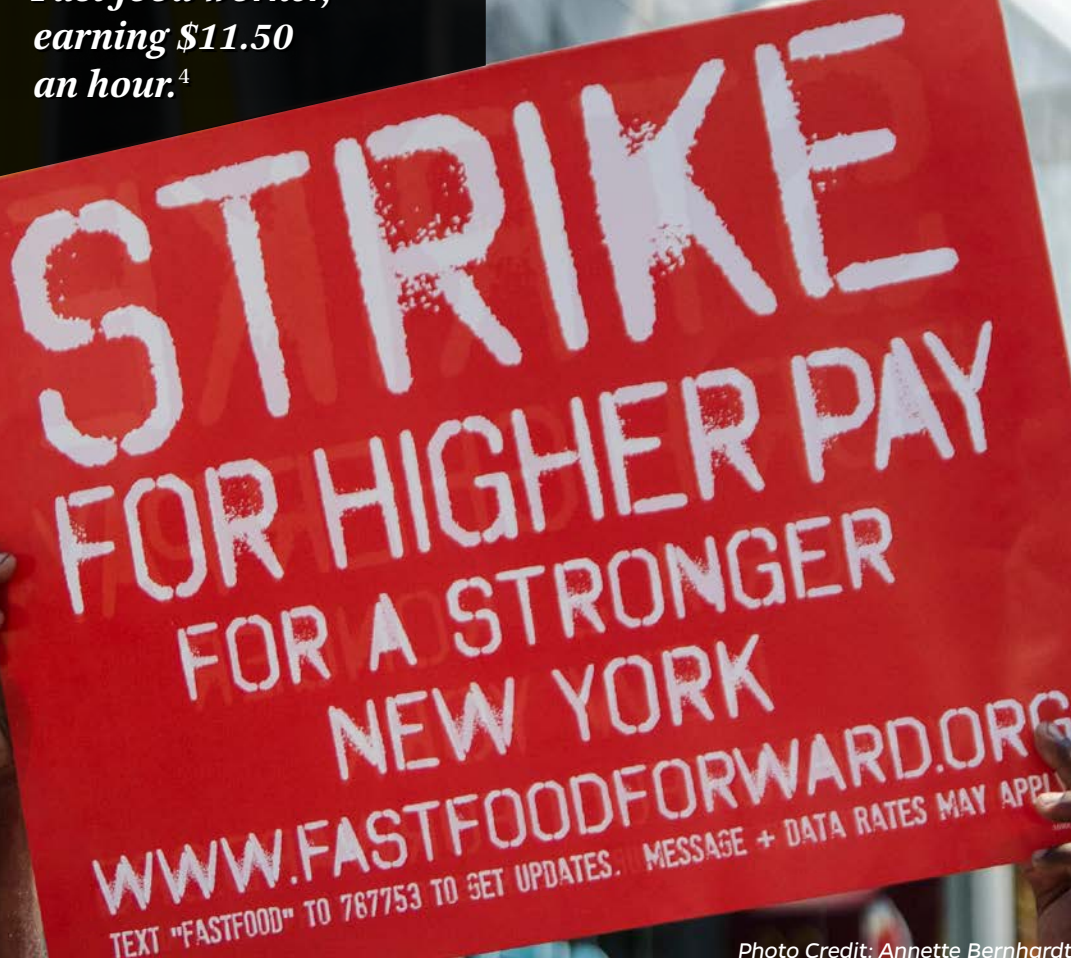
FAST FOOD WORKER

“I’ve worked 14 years [for a pizza chain] and I can’t support a family. I have a 2-year-old daughter and a 3-month-old son.”

– Fast food worker, earning \$11.50 an hour.⁴

“I have had only a 10-cent raise in [10] years. ... Although I live alone, what I make is not enough; the cost of living keeps rising. ... If it wasn’t for food stamps and Medicare I wouldn’t be able to take care of myself.”

– Fast food maintenance worker, 81, earning \$7.25 an hour in New York City.⁵



STRIKE
FOR HIGHER PAY
FOR A STRONGER
NEW YORK
WWW.FASTFOODFORWARD.ORG
TEXT "FASTFOOD" TO 767753 TO GET UPDATES. MESSAGE + DATA RATES MAY APPLY

Photo Credit: Annette Bernhardt, 2013. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0.

Food Justice in Action Handout

Instructions: Read your group’s assigned case study and prepare a brief presentation that will:

- Describe the risks and challenges faced by these workers
- Describe the intervention to promote fair wages and/or safer working conditions
- Assess whether you think the intervention is an effective approach
- Propose an additional intervention

Crop workers

According to the National Agricultural Workers Survey, the average income of a crop worker in 2009 was less than \$12,500 for individuals and less than \$17,500 for a family of four. That same year, the federal poverty line was \$10,830 for an individual or \$22,050 for a family of four.⁶ For crop workers who harvest fruits or vegetables, pay is often based on how much they pick, which is called a “piece rate.” The incentive to pick more can discourage workers from taking breaks to rest, eat, or drink water and from taking days off for health or personal reasons. In 1996, a federal minimum wage was established to ensure farm workers are paid a certain amount regardless of how much they pick. However, loopholes remain, and farms and companies can bypass this law if the farms are small enough or if the workers are hired as contractors instead of as employees.⁷

In addition to the problems with piece rates, U.S. farm workers face particularly high risks of toxic exposure to pesticides, particularly when pesticides drift (are blown by wind) away from where they are sprayed.⁸ Workers in crop production also suffer 80 percent more injuries compared to the national average for private industries.⁹ Only one in 10 seasonal farm workers claims the ability to read or speak English fluently, potentially increasing their risks of pesticide exposure and injury (e.g., if they are unable to read warning labels). As nearly half of U.S. crop workers are immigrants who are not authorized to work in the U.S., these workers may not seek healthcare or better working conditions due to fear of employer retaliation or deportation.

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) is campaigning for an increase in minimum farm worker wages and has developed a Fair Food Code of Conduct. By signing on to the code, companies that grow and buy produce are supporting better working conditions. Participating growers must, for example, take measures to protect workers from excessive heat, pesticides, and other hazards, and workers who feel in danger for their health or safety must be allowed to stop working (without pay) without fear of retaliation. As of 2015, 14 major buyers had signed Fair Food Agreements with the CIW, including Compass Group (the world’s largest food service provider), Chipotle, McDonald’s, Trader Joe’s, Walmart, and Whole Foods.¹⁰

Truck drivers

The trucking industry is heavily regulated, and rules about how many hours truckers can be on the road per week have resulted in companies hiring more drivers to ship the same amount of cargo, often at lower wages. Some companies encourage drivers to quietly violate federal rules on the amount of hours they drive each week. Violating these rules earns drivers and shipping companies more money, but as one driver states in a 2014 *Business Insider* article, “When you’re non-compliant as a driver you run the risk of fatigue and the risk of hurting other people [...] And as a driver it’s my license on the line.” According to the article, the driver “said he was asked by multiple trucking companies to falsify his logs, but he refused to.”¹¹ Making matters harder for drivers, bills have been proposed that would remove limits on how many hours they can work and how large their trailers can be. Organizations such as the Teamsters (a union that represents truck drivers) and the Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety have pressured lawmakers to oppose such bills, which they say can endanger both truckers and other drivers on the road.

Meat processing workers

Although slaughterhouses and meat-processing facilities are highly mechanized, certain steps of the process must be done by hand. Some workers kill and bleed the animals while others make a series of cuts to separate fat, muscle, and bone. Plant workers may be required to use sharp tools and heavy machinery, at high speeds, under crowded conditions, for long hours, and on slippery floors—sometimes without adequate training.³ As a result, workers in the meat-processing industry face a very high rate of injury—over 40 percent higher than the average for the private-sector American workforce.¹² To keep costs down and the volume of production high, the conveyor belts that transport animals and carcasses through facilities move at very high speeds—up to 140 birds per minute at poultry processing plants, for example.¹³ Workers frequently experience chronic pain in their hands, wrists, arms, shoulders, and back from performing quick, repetitive motions. Workers who use sharp equipment, like knives, are also at risk of serious injuries due to dull and fast-moving blades.¹⁴ Slaughterhouse workers who incur cuts, burns, or scrapes may be at greater risk of infections, particularly from antibiotic-resistant strains of bacteria.¹⁵

Many workers are pressured to not report their injuries. Corporations often reward facility supervisors with bonuses if they report low numbers of workers' compensation claims. One worker in Nebraska explained, "Once the company got fined for safety violations and the manager told us: 'Be careful or we'll have to pay more fines'—not be careful because you might get hurt."³ Organizations like the Food Empowerment Project advocate for stricter regulation of slaughterhouse line speeds, limits on the amount of overtime workers can be required to do, and increased reporting of worker injuries.

Fast food workers

Fast food employees are among the lowest-paid workers in the U.S.,¹⁶ while as of 2012, the CEOs of that industry earned over 1,200 times as much as the average worker.¹⁷ That's more than four times the amount of CEO-to-worker inequality in the U.S. economy as a whole.¹⁸

In November 2012, fast food workers around the U.S. began a wave of one-day strikes to demand a \$15 an hour minimum wage and the right to form a union. While their struggle was partly aimed at their employers, they also needed to combat a public perception that fast food employees are mostly teenagers who are just picking up a little pocket money. The reality is that only about 30 percent of the fast food workforce is made up of teenagers. Among adult fast food workers, a large proportion are parents (30 percent), and a much higher proportion (70 percent) have completed high school, if not more.¹⁹

To try to win public support for the fast food strikes, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU)—which organized the fast food strikes along with Fast Food Forward—hired a public relations firm, BerlinRosen, to help attract media coverage of the workers and their movement.²⁰ Numerous media outlets have covered the campaign. Despite this success, some people have criticized this PR-focused strategy—and the top-down nature of the organizing effort—as detracting from efforts to organize workers into a union. One worker lamented: "I don't like the fact that these people, the workers, are being used like pawns. ... tell them what to say, what makes the best story for the media." SEIU organizers expressed concern that this kind of criticism of the campaign would only provide a public relations boost to political factions who already oppose it.²¹

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