Food and Beverage Serving and Related Workers

Pay

The median hourly wage for food and beverage serving and related workers was $9.16 in May 2015. The median wage is the wage at which half the workers in an occupation earned more than that amount and half earned less. The lowest 10 percent earned less than $8.02, and the highest 10 percent earned more than $12.42.

Median hourly wages for food and beverage serving and related workers in May 2015 were as follows:

- Food servers, nonrestaurant: $9.82
- Food preparation and serving related workers, all other: $9.80
- Dining room and cafeteria attendants and bartender helpers: $9.27
- Counter attendants, cafeteria, food concession, and coffee shop: $9.24
- Hosts and hostesses, restaurant, lounge, and coffee shop: $9.22
- Combined food preparation and serving workers, including fast food: $9.09

Although some workers in these occupations earn tips, most get their earnings from hourly wages alone. Many beginning or inexperienced workers earn the federal minimum wage ($7.25 per hour as of July 24, 2009), although many states set minimum wages higher than the federal minimum.

Tipped employees earn at least the federal minimum wage, which may be paid as a combination of direct wages and tips, depending of the state. Direct wages may be as low as $2.13 per hour, according to the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).

According to the FLSA, tipped employees are those who regularly receive more than $30 a month in tips. The Wage and Hour Division of the U.S. Department of Labor maintains a website with minimum wages for tipped employees, by state, although some localities have enacted minimum wages higher than their state requires.

In some restaurants, workers may contribute all or a portion of their tips to a tip pool, which is distributed among qualifying workers. Tip pools allow workers who do not usually receive tips directly from customers, such as dining room attendants, to be part of a team and to share in the rewards for good service.

Employers may provide meals and uniforms, but may deduct the costs from the worker's wages.

Many food and beverage serving and related workers were employed part time in 2014. For example, about 1 in 2 combined food preparation and serving workers, including fast food, the largest occupation in this profile, worked part time in 2014. Because of dining hours in food service and drinking establishments, early morning, late evening, weekend, and holidays work is common. Those who work in school cafeterias have more regular hours and may work only during the school year, usually 9 to 10 months.

In addition, business hours in restaurants allow for flexible schedules that appeal to many teenagers, who can gain work experience. Compared with all other occupations, a much larger proportion of food and beverage serving and related workers were 16 to 19 years old in 2014.