



International Association on  
Work in Agriculture's Webinars

# Work and jobs in alternative food networks. The case of short food chains in North America.

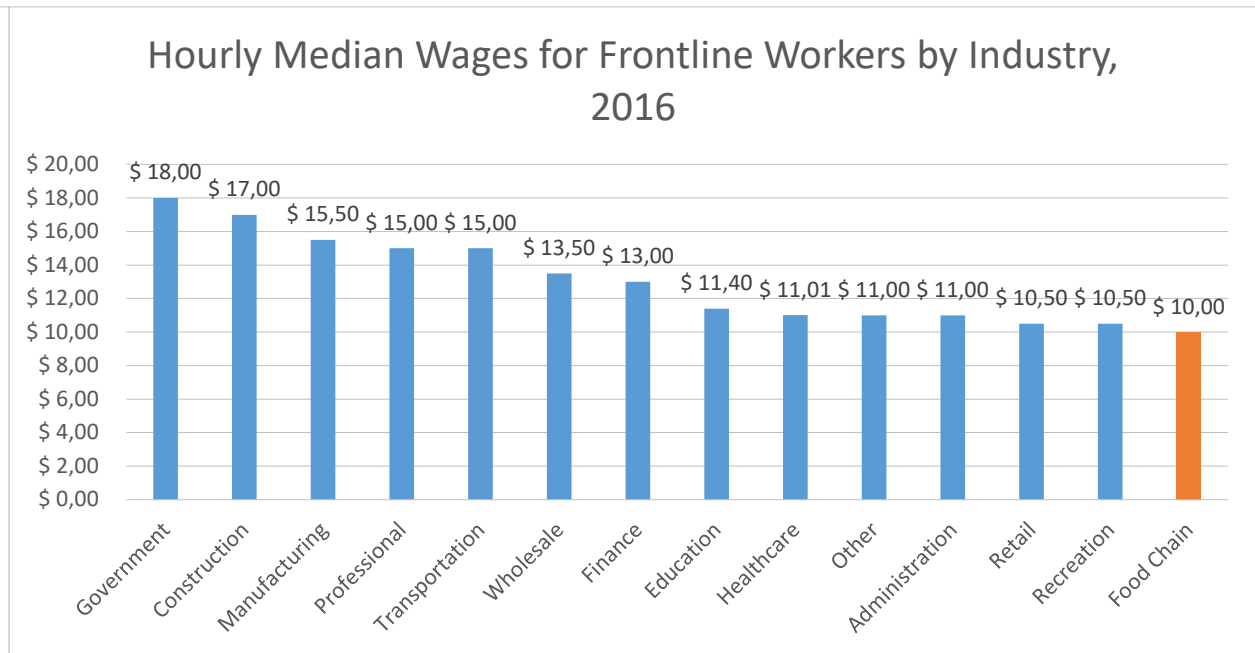
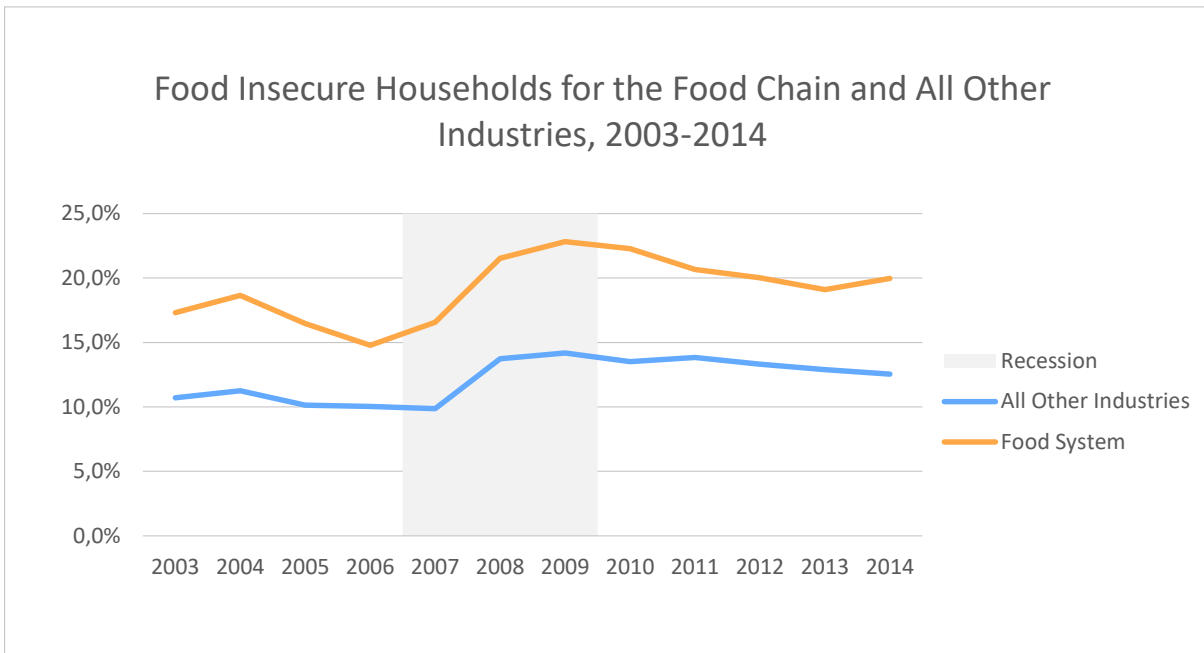
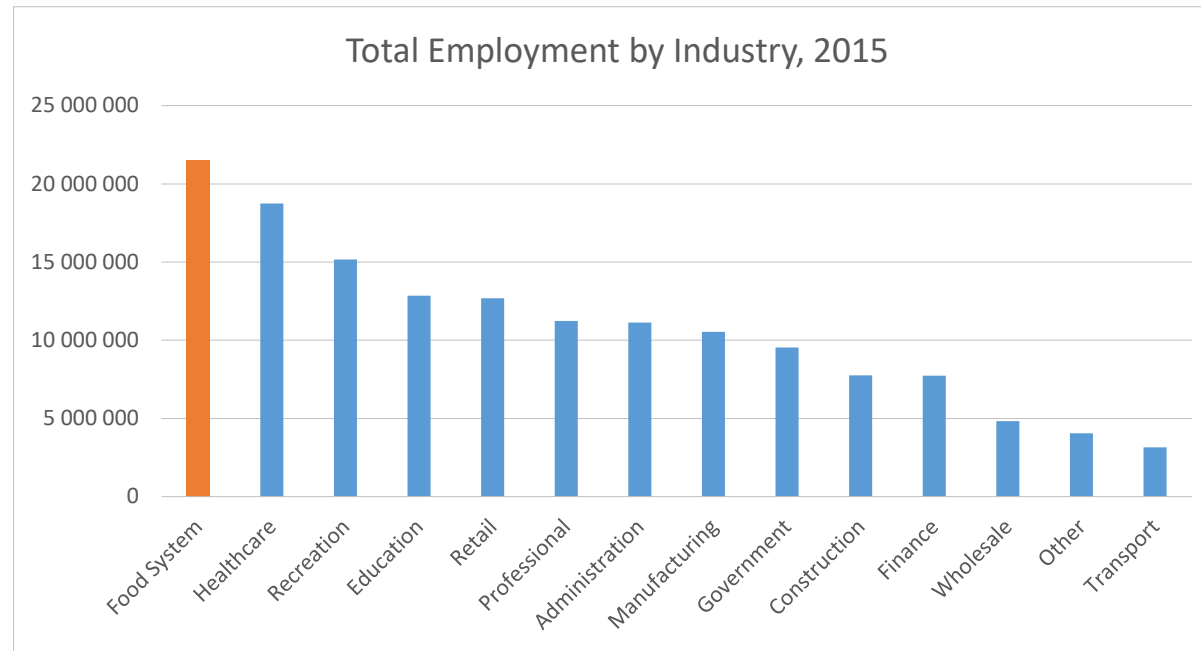
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December 1st, 2022

Source: Food Chain Workers Alliance and Solidarity Research Cooperative, 2016



“...any alternative to industrial labor practices is assumed to be better.”

(Kelmenson, 2022)



# Content

- Job creation, volunteering and labor productivity
- Narratives, satisfaction, precarity
- Gender-specific issues

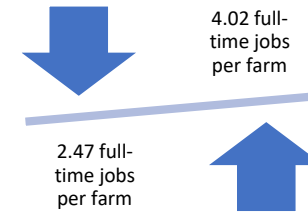


# Job creation, volunteering and labor productivity

- More of what, exactly?

- More jobs? (Mundler & Laughrea, 2016; Bermond et al., 2019)

- Annual Work Unit per farm or per 100 ha 



- More workload vs labor productivity

- Low labor productivity (\$/hour) during production phase, relatively higher in processing and distribution phase (Mundler & Jean-Gagnon, 2020)
- VS the only competitive openings in US Alternative Food Systems were (Kelmenson, 2022):
  - “Drivers/Sales Workers”, “Cashiers” and “Retail salespersons”, and some “Food Preparation and Serving Related” occupations

# Job creation, volunteering and labor productivity

- More of what, exactly?
  - More unpaid work? (Biewener, 2016)
  - SFSCs seem to rely heavily on unpaid work: as initial investment, internship as a reciprocal exchange, as « intrinsic reward »

“Unpaid food work is not commodified work since it involves labor that is performed without receiving a wage. (...) Yet, in itself, uncommodified work or unpaid work is not inherently less exploitative or more just than capitalist wage-labor.” (p. 47)

“First you volunteer to prove your dedication. Then you get a stipend which basically means working for less than minimum wage. Then you might eventually get a low-paid job where you can barely make ends meet.” (A food system activist, p. 49)

# Job creation, volunteering and labor productivity

- More of what, exactly?
  - SFSCs convey an attractive agroecological project
  - Not different, but make a « promise of difference »? (Le Velly, 2019)

# Narratives, satisfaction, precarity

- A gap between what people say (or feel) and what people do?
  - « SFSCs are good » vs « local washing » (Fitting et al., 2022)

“Accompanied with enticing marketing campaigns promoting local restaurants and Nova Scotian food culture, programs such as Taste Nova Scotia and Nova Scotia Loyal are, we argue, forms of government and industry “local washing”. (...) Moreover, the image of “local” used in buy local campaigns rarely, if ever, shows the central role of migrant labor. As Evelyn Encalada Grez explains, “food campaigns [...] urge Canadians to buy local but do not include the images and voices of racialized migrant farm workers toiling in the farms and fields” (2018, p. 20)

- labor and the locavore (Gray, 2013)
- Job quality issues (Kelmenson, 2022)
  - Farming and production jobs don't offer living wages, and wages are rarely competitive



# Narratives, satisfaction, precarity

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- A gap between what people say (or feel) and what people do?
  - « Happy »...but overwhelmed (Azima & Mundler, 2022a)
  - « Resilient » or « Self-exploitative »? (Nichols et al., 2022)
  - CSA's promises and pitfalls (Paul, 2019)

# Narratives, satisfaction, precarity

- A gap between what people say (or feel) and what people do?
  - Is it just a labor productivity issue at the end of the day?
  - Implications for public policy and locavores
    - Beyond « local washing » and voting with your dollars



# Gender-specific issues

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- Whose job is it anyway, and why? Gender, care work, empowerment and values
  - Women's labor as locavores (Castellano, 2016)
  - From invisible to visible women farmers (Sachs et al., 2016)

# Gender-specific issues

- Whose job is it anyway, and why? Gender, care work, empowerment and values (Azima and Mundler, 2022b; Wright & Annes, 2020)
  - SFSCs and women farmers' empowerment
  - Performing gender or care work?
  - A female ethics of farming...or a feminist one?

# Conclusion

- Beyond assumptions...
- Overlooked questions (regulations, standards....)
- Increasing local food procurement is not enough...(Kelmenson, 2022)
- We need more...research



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