AMERICAN MEAT INSTITUTE **FACT SHEET**

Employment and Wages in the Meat Industry

The meat and poultry industry employs more than 500,000 workers. Nearly 150,000 work in meat packing plants (those that slaughter animals) while more than 119,000 work in meat processing plants that further process meat cuts into ground beef, hot dogs, ham and other products. Almost232,000 work in poultry processing.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), employees in both meat packing and meat processing plants on average work a 40-hour work week.

Hourly workers in packing plants on average earn $13.52 per hour, while employees in meat processing plants earn $14.62 an hour (Source: U.S. Department of Labor). By and large, hourly positions in the meat industry do not require formal education or previous experience. Training is provided on the job.

These hourly wages translate into more than $25,000 a year in annual wages.

Employment and Earnings for Meat and Poultry Industries Compared with Food – 2010 (U.S. Dept. of Labor)

Industry	Meat Packing	Meat Processing	Poultry Processing	All Food
Total Employees	148,000	119,400	231,500	1,459,000
Production Workers	127,000	97,400	205,300	1,163,100
Average Weekly Earnings	$574.60	$625.13	$432.04	$576.00
Average Weekly Hours	42.5	42.7	39.3	40.0
Average Hourly Earnings	$13.52	$14.64	$11.37	$14.40

Benefits

Wages alone do not paint a complete picture of compensation in the meat industry. Like many employers in a tight labor market, the U.S. meat industry offers many benefits to attract and retain workers.

According to a 2006 survey of American Meat Institute members, 97 percent of plants responding indicated that they provide health insurance coverage. This compares well to the national average of 63 percent of private establishments offering health insurance.

Respondents to the AMI survey also indicated that employees share some costs of health insurance. Seventy-four percent of plant respondents said the company pays more than half; 13 percent said the employer pays more than 90 percent of the premiums and ten percent said the employer covers 100 percent of the premiums. According to BLS, on average, for workers who made less than $15 an hour, employers paid a $228.42 monthly health care premium while the employee paid $72.23.

Other key findings from the AMI survey include:

- 92 percent of plant respondents said they offer additional insurance like life insurance and short and long term disability.
- 52 percent of responding plants offered wellness programs. According to an Employee Benefit Research Institute (EBRI) 2003 survey, 23 percent of employees had access to wellness programs.
- 96 percent of responding plants offer pension, 401(k) or other investment plans.
- 75 percent of responding plants offered educational assistance like classes or tuition reimbursement.
- 29 percent of responding plants offered English as a Second Language classes.
- 55 percent of responding plants offered scholarships.

One-third of AMI survey respondents said the cost of benefits represents 20-29 percent of wages. Another one third says the cost of benefits represents 30-39 percent of wages.

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In terms of benefit waiting periods, 19 percent of responding plants said there is no waiting period for benefits; 50 percent of responding plants said the waiting period is between three and six months. And 21 percent said the waiting period is six months.

Role of Unions

Unions have long played a significant role in the meat industry. According to the United Food and Commercial Workers, 60 percent of meat packing and processing employees are estimated to be represented by the union. This is substantially higher than the overall U.S. private sector union representation rate of 7.9 percent (Source: BLS).

Employee Health and Safety

Ensuring the health and safety of employees is key to reducing turnover and ensuring workforce stability. In 1990, the American Meat Institute made worker safety a "non-competitive" issue to encourage members to work together to enhance the industry's worker safety and health record. Also that year, AMI collaborated with the United Food and Commercial Workers Union and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to develop Voluntary Ergonomic Guidelines for the Meat Industry.

Since that time, "lost workday" illnesses and injuries have declined by nearly 60 percent. "Total recordable injuries" have declined by more than 70 percent. For more information on worker safety, see the AMI Fact Sheet "Worker Safety in the Meat and Poultry Industry."

Helpful Links

American Meat Institute
http://www.meatami.com
http://www.workersafety.org

U.S Department of Labor
http://www.dol.gov

Bureau of Labor Statistics
http://www.bls.gov

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