## Our Recommendations

1. **Level the playing field by providing paid sick days and increasing the tipped minimum wage.** Policymakers should level the playing field by enacting policies to provide paid sick days to their workers. The lack of paid sick days can result in public health challenges for the entire region. This can also help raise the minimum wage for tipped workers to be closer to the minimum wage for all other workers.

2. **Incentivize high-road practices.** Initiatives and incentives should be considered to assist and encourage employers to provide high-wage, basic workplace benefits, and opportunities for advancement to restaurant workers. Such initiatives could include rent and property tax incentives for employers who implement exceptional workplace practices, subsidies to employer-based health insurance, or support of collective health insurance programs across the industry, such as the one that ROC has developed nationally.

3. **Promote opportunity, penalize discrimination.** Policymakers must employ initiatives that encourage internal promotion and discourage discrimination on the basis of race and immigration status in the restaurant industry.

4. **Enforce employment laws in the restaurant industry.** Labor, employment and health and safety standards should be strictly enforced. Legislators should consider an employer’s compliance with these standards in granting government licenses. Employers must also be educated about their legal responsibilities towards their employees and provided necessary support to meet their obligations to their workers and to the public. It is in the interest of both workers and the public at large that existing standards be observed and enforced.

5. **Promote model employer practices.** Model employer practices should be publicized to provide much-needed public recognition to other employers in the industry. The vast majority of employers we interviewed agreed in theory that high-road workplace practices were better. However, many expressed ignorance of how to successfully implement them in practice.

6. **Respect workers’ right to organize.** Barriers to organizing restaurant workers should be addressed and the public benefits of such arrangements should be publicized in light of the significant benefits to workers and employers alike which can arise when workers organize.

7. **Support further industry research.** Further study and dialogue should be undertaken that includes restaurant workers, employers, and decision-makers in order to ensure effective and sustainable solutions to the issues identified in our study—especially race-based discrimination, and the impacts of the industry’s practices on health care and public program costs.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Behind the Kitchen Door:** The Social Impact of Inequality in Miami’s Growing Restaurant Industry

Miami-Dade Restaurant Industry Coalition Partners include:
- Miami-Dade Restaurant Industry Coalition
- Take Back the Land-Miami
- Miami Workers’ Center
- No Fixed Address
- Restaurant Workers United
- South Florida Jobs With Justice
- Food Merchants United
- Restaurant Opportunities Centers United

The Coalition would like to thank the many students, interns, restaurant owners, and restaurant workers who devoted many hours to conducting surveys, interviews, and generally assisting with this project. In particular, we would like to thank the following volunteers and student interns for their assistance in conducting interviews and analyzing survey data: Ashley McElroy, Christopher Stephens, Erik Tomajczyk, Nancy Traverso, Lee Goldberg, Reme Rianc, Danielle Cofar, Farhan Siddiqui, and Maggie Ye. The Coalition would also like to thank photographers Keller Motzuczka and Mehran Fart Osegir for the images used in this report.

**Miami-Dade Restaurant Industry Coalition Partners**

- Florida Immigrant Coalition
- Florida International University Center for Labor Research & Studies
- Florida Legal Services
- Human Services Coalition of Miami
- Karen Leiberman, Ph.D., Moss & Weiss University
- Miami Workers’ Center
- Noah Scalin Weilman, Supermarket & Skid Row
- Restaurant Opportunities Centers United
- Restaurant Opportunities Centers United
- South Florida Interfaith Worker Justice
- South Florida Jobs With Justice
- Take Back the Land-Miami

**RESTAURANT OPPORTUNITIES CENTER OF MIAMI (ROC MIAMI)**

1. **BES DURANT OPPORTUNITIES CENTERS UNITED (ROC UNITED)**

**Research Supported By:**
- The Ford Foundation
- The Discount Foundation
- The Public Welfare Foundation
- The Moshah Foundation
- The Undergraduate University Wachovia Program
- Human Services Coalition (Catalyst Miami)
- Florida Immigrant Coalition
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**By: The Restaurant Opportunities Center of Miami, Restaurant Opportunities Centers United, and the Miami-Dade Restaurant Industry Coalition**

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**Design by Kim Burgas**

February 14, 2011

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A Resilient and Growing Industry
Miami-Dade County is home to a vibrant, robust, and growing restaurant industry. The industry includes 3,399 food service and drinking places that contribute to the region’s tourism, hospitality and entertainment sectors and to the economy as a whole. In 2017, the Florida restaurant industry accounted for an estimated $1.6 billion of the state’s revenues from sales tax.

Perhaps the industry’s most important contribution to the region’s economy is the thousands of job opportunities and careers it provides. Despite the current economic recession, the Miami-Dade restaurant industry continues to grow. Employment growth in the Miami-Dade food service sector has outpaced that of the Miami-Dade economy since 2000 and the restaurant industry proved much more resilient than the rest of the economy during the recent recession (see Figure 1). Miami-Dade County restaurant owners employed 94,900 workers, or 73% of the county’s total private sector employment.

However, additional financial demands are not required for the majority of workers to engage in the industry. The restaurant industry is an integral part of Miami-Dade County’s economy and critical to the lives of thousands of workers and employers.

Many Bad Jobs, A Few Good Ones

Behind the Kitchen Door: Inequality & Opportunity in Miami-Dade County’s Growing Restaurant Industry

ABOUT THIS STUDY

This study was conceived of and designed by the Miami-Dade Restaurant Industry Coalition—a broad gathering of academics, policy analysts, worker advocates, worker organizers, workers, restaurant owners, and public sector and restaurant industry employees. This paper represents one of the most comprehensive research analyses of the conditions of workers in the restaurant industry. The research was conducted in 2019 and 2020.

One study was required by the need for meaningful inputs of the overall benefits of the restaurant industry, which is fundamental to Miami-Dade County’s economy, the level of “good jobs” has been essential to the success of restaurant workers. The restaurant workers are essential to the sustainability of the industry and provide considerable opportunity for development of meaningful businesses. It is necessary to consider the many dimensions of information about the industry to the perspectives of both workers and employers available to stakeholders to ensure the industry’s sustainable growth.

While there are a few “good” restaurant jobs in the industry, in general the majority are “bad jobs,” characterized by very low wages, few benefits, and limited opportunities for career advancement or increased livable wages. In 2019, the median hourly wage for restaurant workers was only $8.48, which means that half of all Miami-Dade restaurant workers earn less.

In our own survey of restaurant workers, the vast majority (99.9%) reported that their employer do not offer health insurance. Earnings in the restaurant industry have also lagged behind those in the private sector in terms of annual earnings, restaurant workers on average made only $18,912 in 2019 compared to $43,219 for the total private sector, according to the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Several workers in our study reported overtime and minimum wage violations, lack of health and safety training, and failure to implement health and safety awareness in workplace. Close to half of all workers surveyed (47.5%) reported being exposed to a safe and healthy workplace.

Effective Summary

The restaurant industry in Miami-Dade County is an integral part of Miami-Dade County’s economy and critical to the lives of thousands of restaurant workers and employers. The restaurant industry is an integral part of Miami-Dade County’s economy and critical to the lives of thousands of workers and employers.

The Social Costs of Low-Wage Jobs

Our research also reveals the hidden costs to customers and taxpayers of low-wage and low-road workplace practices. Violations of employment and health and safety laws place customers at risk and endanger the public. For example, restaurant employers who violate labor laws also are more likely to violate health and safety standards in the workplace—such as failing to provide health and safety training, or forcing workers to engage in practices that harm the health and safety of customers.

The pervasiveness of accidents coupled with the fact that for restaurant workers health insurance can lead to escalating uncompensated care costs incurred by public hospitals. For example, 24.4% of surveyed workers reported that they or a family member had visited the emergency room without being able to pay for their treatment.

Finally, low wages and lack of job security among restaurant workers has led to increased reliance on social assistance programs resulting in an indirect subsidy to employers engaging in low-road practices and fewer such public resources available for expenditures such as education, public transportation, and social services. In fact, restaurant workers and high-road employees are less likely to seek medical care and are more likely to have health insurance.

The High Road Is Possible

It is possible to create good jobs while maintaining a successful business in the restaurant industry. Our interviews with employers revealed that it is possible to run a successful restaurant business while paying livable wages, providing workplace benefits such as adequate levels of staffing, providing necessary training, and creating career advancement opportunities.

In fact, close to 9% of the workers we surveyed reported earning a livable wage, and similar numbers reported receiving workplace benefits, enabling them to engage in low-road practices and fewer such public resources available for expenditures such as education, public transportation, and social services. In fact, restaurant workers and high-road employees are less likely to seek medical care and are more likely to have health insurance.

Employer satisfaction with livable-wage employers revealed that it was on the basis of size.