

# One Job Should Be Enough in the Airline Industry

## Catering on the Margins at American, Delta and United

Airline catering, once subject to the barbs of uninspiring stand-up comics, is no longer a laughing matter. It now represents a highly specialized and carefully designed component of the United States' thriving airline business. The nation's three largest carriers, American Airlines, Delta Air Lines, and United Airlines have achieved **nearly \$50 billion in profit** in the past five years alone, and airline catering corporations are riding the coattails of the airline industry's outsized growth.

American, Delta, and United work closely with catering companies to meet the complicated dietary needs of millions of flyers. The two largest caterers, LSG Sky Chefs and Gate Gourmet, employ **over 18,000 kitchen workers** in transportation hubs across the US.

Employment at LSG Sky Chefs has increased by over sixty percent in the course of the past decade. The number of air passengers could as much as double over the course of the next twenty years, ensuring the continued growth of airline catering.

**Despite airlines' profits from catering, the airline catering industry pays the workers who prepare its "first-class feast" poorly.**



**From the simplest sandwich to a first-class feast, our chefs bring care, skill and innovation to every dish, inspired by some of the world's most prestigious restaurants.**

— Gate Gourmet

**Given the immense value catering staff bring to the airlines' passenger experience, why are the majority of workers earning less than \$15 per hour, with some earning as low as \$8.40?**

	HUB AIRLINE	CATERER	MINIMUM WAGE IN KITCHEN	MEDIAN WAGE IN KITCHEN
CHARLOTTE	AMERICAN AIRLINES	LSG SKY CHEFS	\$8.40	\$9.65
DALLAS	AMERICAN AIRLINES	LSG SKY CHEFS	\$9.85	\$11.35
MIAMI	AMERICAN AIRLINES	LSG SKY CHEFS	\$10.00	\$11.30
CHICAGO	AMERICAN AIRLINES	GATE GOURMET	\$12.15	\$13.98
CHICAGO	UNITED AIRLINES	LSG SKY CHEFS	\$14.10	\$14.10
NEW YORK CITY - JFK	AMERICAN AIRLINES, DELTA AIR LINES	LSG SKY CHEFS	\$15.00	\$15.00
WASHINGTON, DC - DCA	AMERICAN AIRLINES	LSG SKY CHEFS	\$12.15	\$12.90

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Working in the catering industry is hard on your body. We all do lots of lifting, pushing of heavy carts, and operating machinery. It can be dangerous too: in 2017 I was hit in the head by a plane door and lost consciousness. On top of that, I'm a survivor of lymphoma and I need regular checkups, so I pay the \$52 per week for an individual plan. It's expensive and the out-of-pocket costs are high, but I really don't have a choice with my medical history.

— Juan Blanco, LSG Sky Chefs, JFK Airport



**The majority of airline catering workers still earn less than \$15 per hour, even though many have cooked, cleaned and served for the catering corporations for years.**

*Bobby Kirkpatrick has worked for over 38 years at Charlotte Douglass International Airport where wages start at \$8.40 per hour. Bobby's annual earnings are less today in inflation-adjusted dollars than they were in 2001.<sup>1</sup>*

The industry can certainly afford to do better. Pilots, flight attendants, and ramp workers have received well-deserved increases in total compensation of over \$1 billion at American and \$900 million at United. Yet airline catering staff have been excluded: these essential members of the team don't share in the industry's growing profits.

**Many work without health care benefits. Only 34% of workers at Gate Gourmet and LSG Sky Chefs receive employer provided health insurance.**

A spring 2019 survey of 85 workers by UNITE HERE of airline caterers at JFK Airport in New York found that **19 percent** of workers have no health

insurance at all. Over **two-thirds** of the uninsured reported they cannot afford to seek medical care if they become sick.

**45 percent** of surveyed workers reported that they are enrolled in government-subsidized health insurance, while another **14 percent** are on Medicaid. **44 percent** of surveyed workers with dependent children say that their kids are on Medicaid.

Airline catering workers in over twenty cities have now voted to strike when released to do so by the government. Their goal is to finally obtain the income and healthcare benefits that they deserve.



<sup>1</sup> Ted Reed. "As Low-Paid Airline Kitchen Workers Speak Out, American And Delta Say They Have Paid For Raises." *Forbes*. June 8, 2017.