

SIGNIFICANT POINTS

- Numerous job openings—many of them part time and relatively low paying—should be available due to the industry’s large size and high rate of turnover.
- Many grocery store workers are young: people who are 16 to 24 years old hold 32 percent of the jobs.
- Cashiers and stock clerks and order fillers account for 49 percent of all jobs.
- College graduates will fill most new management positions.

Nature of the Industry

Grocery stores, also known as supermarkets, are familiar to everyone. They sell an array of fresh and preserved foods, primarily for preparation and consumption at home. They also often sell prepared food, such as hot entrees or salads, for takeout meals. Stores range in size from “supercenters,” which may employ hundreds of workers, provide a variety of consumer services, and sell numerous food and nonfood items, to traditional supermarkets to convenience stores with small staffs and limited selections.

Convenience stores, however, also often sell fuel, including gasoline, diesel fuel, kerosene, and propane. Recently, many convenience stores have expanded their scope of services by providing automatic teller machines, money orders, and a more comprehensive selection of products, including food for immediate consumption and an assortment of nonfood items.

(Specialty grocery stores—meat and fish markets; fruit and vegetables markets; candy, nut, and confectionery stores; dairy products stores; retail bakeries; and health and dietetic food stores, for example—are not covered in this section. Food services and drinking places that sell food and beverages for consumption on the premises are also excluded. The latter are discussed elsewhere in the *Career Guide*.)

Grocery stores are found everywhere, although the size of the establishment and the range of goods and services offered vary. Traditionally, inner-city stores are small and offer a limited selection, although larger stores, including specialty grocers and a few supercenters, are now being built in many urban areas; suburban stores are predominantly large supermarkets and supercenters with a more diverse stock. Most supermarkets include several specialty departments that offer the products and services of seafood stores, bakeries, delicatessens, pharmacies, or florist shops. Household goods, health and beauty care items, automotive supplies, pet products, greeting cards, and clothing also are among the nonfood items that can be found at large supermarkets. Some of the largest supermarkets, including wholesale clubs, even have cafeterias or food courts, and a few feature convenience stores, automotive services, and full-service banks. In addition, most grocery stores may offer basic banking services and automatic teller machines, postal services, onsite film processing, drycleaning, video rentals, and catering services.

Working Conditions

Working conditions in most grocery stores are pleasant, with clean, well-lighted, climate-controlled surroundings. Work can

be hectic, and dealing with customers can be stressful.

Grocery stores are open more hours and days than most work establishments, so workers are needed for early morning, late night, weekend, and holiday work. With employees working 30.8 hours a week, on average, these jobs are particularly attractive to workers who have family or school responsibilities or another job.

Most grocery store workers wear some sort of uniform, such as a jacket or an apron, that identifies them as store employees and keeps their personal clothing clean. Health and safety regulations require some workers, such as those who work in the delicatessen or meat department, to wear head coverings, safety glasses, or gloves.

In 2003, cases of work-related injury and illness averaged 7.2 per 100 full-time workers in grocery stores, compared with 5.0 per 100 full-time workers in the entire private sector. Some injuries occur while workers transport or stock goods. Persons in food-processing occupations, such as butchers and meatcutters, as well as cashiers working with computer scanners or traditional cash registers, may be vulnerable to cumulative trauma and other repetitive motion injuries.

Employment

Grocery stores ranked among the largest industries in 2004, providing 2.4 million wage-and-salary jobs. About 31 percent of all grocery store employees worked part time, and the average work-week of nonsupervisory workers was 30.8 hours. Some self-employed workers also worked in grocery stores, mostly in smaller establishments.

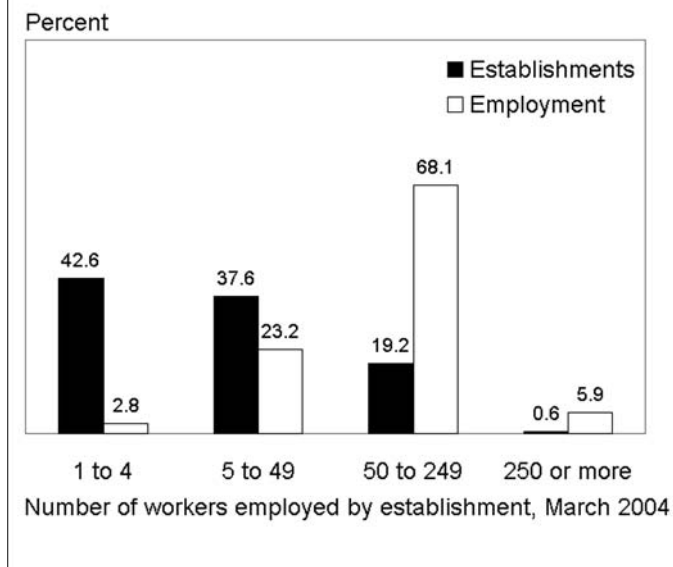
In 2004, there were 85,000 grocery stores throughout the Nation. Most grocery stores are small; 80 percent employ fewer than 50 workers. Most jobs, however, are found in the largest stores. Seventy-four percent of workers were employed in grocery stores with more than 50 workers (chart 1).

Many grocery store workers are young: people who are 16 to 24 years old hold 32 percent of the jobs. This reflects the large number of jobs in this industry open to young workers who have little or no work experience.

Occupations in the Industry

Grocery store workers stock shelves on the sales floor; prepare food and other goods; assist customers in locating, purchasing, and understanding the content and uses of various items; and provide support services to the establishment. However, 49 percent of all grocery store employees are cashiers or stock clerks

Nearly 70 percent of the jobs in grocery stores are in establishments with between 50 and 250 workers.



and order fillers.

Cashiers make up the largest occupation in grocery stores, accounting for 34 percent of all workers (table 1). They scan the items being purchased by customers, total the amount due, accept payment, make change, fill out charge forms, and produce a cash register receipt that shows the quantity and price of the items. In most supermarkets, the cashier passes the Universal Product Code, or UPC, on the item's label across a computer scanner that identifies the item and its price, which is automatically relayed to the cash register. In some grocery stores, customers themselves scan and bag their purchases, and pay using an automatic payment terminal, a system known as self-check-out. Cashiers verify that the items have been paid for before the customer leaves, and if needed, assist the customer in completing the transaction. In other grocery stores, the cashier reads a hand-stamped price on each item and keys that price directly into the cash register. Cashiers then place items in bags for customers; accept cash, personal checks, credit cards, or electronic debit card payments; and make change. When cashiers are not needed to check out customers, they sometimes assist other workers.

Stock clerks and order fillers are the second largest occupation in grocery stores, accounting for 15 percent of workers. They fill the shelves with merchandise and arrange displays to attract customers. In stores without computer-scanning equipment, stock clerks and order fillers may have to manually mark prices on individual items and count stock for inventory control.

Many office clerical workers—such as *secretaries and administrative assistants*; *general office clerks*; and *bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks*—prepare and maintain the records necessary to keep grocery stores running smoothly.

Butchers and other meat-, poultry-, and fish-processing workers prepare meat, poultry, and fish for purchase by cutting up and trimming carcasses and large sections into smaller pieces, which they package, weigh, price, and place on display. They also prepare ground meat from other cuts and fill customers' special orders. These workers also may prepare ready-to-heat

Table 1. Employment of wage and salary workers in grocery stores by occupation, 2004 and projected change, 2004-14. (Employment in thousands)

Occupation	Employment, 2004		Percent change, 2004-14
	Number	Percent	
All occupations	2,447	100.0	6.6
Management, business, and financial occupations	59	2.4	21.4
General and operations managers	31	1.3	20.5
Professional and related occupations	46	1.9	54.2
Floral designers	8	0.3	23.3
Pharmacists	18	0.7	60.0
Pharmacy technicians	17	0.7	69.3
Service occupations	316	12.9	18.0
Pharmacy aides	5	0.2	32.5
First-line supervisors/managers of food preparation and serving workers	24	1.0	21.8
Cooks	18	0.7	15.6
Food preparation workers	103	4.2	21.8
Combined food preparation and serving workers, including fast food	98	4.0	15.1
Counter attendants, cafeteria, food concession, and coffee shop	28	1.2	10.1
Janitors and cleaners, except maids and housekeeping cleaners	18	0.7	21.8
Sales and related occupations	1,021	41.7	0.9
First-line supervisors/managers of retail sales workers	129	5.3	12.0
Cashiers, except gaming	824	33.7	-2.6
Retail salespersons	47	1.9	21.8
Office and administrative support occupations	539	22.0	-0.6
First-line supervisors/managers of office and administrative support workers	23	1.0	10.3
Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks	22	0.9	9.6
Customer service representatives	58	2.4	24.6
Stock clerks and order fillers	373	15.2	-6.7
Other office and administrative support workers	25	1.0	3.4
Production occupations	196	8.0	14.8
Bakers	45	1.8	21.7
Butchers and meat cutters	88	3.6	9.6
Meat, poultry, and fish cutters and trimmers	19	0.8	21.8
Transportation and material moving occupations	258	10.6	11.2
Laborers and freight, stock, and material movers, hand	46	1.9	9.6
Packers and packagers, hand	195	8.0	11.0

Note: May not add to totals due to omission of occupations with small employment

foods by filleting or cutting meat, poultry, or fish into bite-sized pieces, preparing and adding vegetables, or applying sauces or breading. While most butchers work in the meat section of grocery stores, many other meat-, poultry-, and fish-processing workers are employed at central processing facilities, from which smaller packages are sent to area stores.

Some specialty workers prepare food for sale in the grocery store but work in kitchens that may not be located in the store. *Bakers* produce breads, rolls, cakes, cookies, and other baked goods. *Chefs and head cooks* direct the preparation, seasoning, and cooking of salads, soups, fish, meats, vegetables, desserts, or other foods. Some plan and price menu items, order supplies, and keep records and accounts. *Cooks and food preparation*

workers make salads—such as coleslaw or potato, macaroni, or chicken salad—and other entrees, and prepare ready-to-heat foods—such as burritos, marinated chicken breasts, or chicken stir-fry—for sale in the delicatessen or in the gourmet food or meat department. Other food preparation workers arrange party platters or prepare various vegetables and fruits that are sold at the salad bar.

Demonstrators and product promoters may offer samples of various products to entice customers to purchase them.

In supermarkets that serve food and beverages for consumption on the premises, *food and beverage serving workers* take orders and serve customers at counters. They may prepare short-order items, such as salads or sandwiches, to be taken out and consumed elsewhere. *Building cleaning workers* keep the stores clean and orderly.

In the warehouses and stockrooms of large supermarkets, *hand laborers and freight, stock, and material movers* move stock and goods in storage and deliver them to the sales floor; they also help load and unload delivery trucks. *Hand packers and packagers*, also known as courtesy clerks or baggers, perform a variety of simple tasks, such as bagging groceries, loading parcels in customers' cars, and returning unpurchased merchandise from the checkout counter to shelves.

First-line managers of retail sales workers supervise mostly entry-level employees in the grocery, produce, meat, and other specialty departments. These managers train employees and schedule their hours; oversee ordering, inspection, pricing, and inventory of goods; monitor sales activity; and make reports to store managers. *General and operations managers* are responsible for the efficient and profitable operation of grocery stores. Working through their department managers, general and operations managers may set store policy, hire and train employees, develop merchandising plans, maintain good customer and community relations, address customer complaints, and monitor the store's profits or losses.

Purchasing managers plan and direct the task of purchasing goods for resale to consumers. Purchasing managers must thoroughly understand grocery store foods, other items, and each store's customers. They must select the best suppliers and maintain good relationships with them. Purchasing managers evaluate their store's sales reports to determine what products are in demand and plan purchases according to their budget.

Because of the expansion of the industry to meet the consumers' desire for "one-stop shopping," grocery stores have begun to employ an array of workers to help meet that need. For example, *marketing and sales managers* forecast sales and develop a marketing plan based on demographic trends, sales data, community needs, and consumer feedback. *Pharmacists* fill customers' drug prescriptions and advise them on over-the-counter medicines. *Inspectors, testers, sorters, samplers, and weighers* assess whether products and facilities meet quality, health, and safety standards. *Human resources, training, and labor relations specialists* are responsible for making sure that employees maintain and, if necessary, improve their skill levels.

Training and Advancement

Most grocery store jobs are entry-level and can be learned in a short time. Employers generally prefer high school graduates for occupations such as cashier, stock clerk and order filler, or food preparation workers. In large supermarket chains, prospective employees are matched with available jobs, hours, and loca-

tions and are usually trained onsite. Cashiers are often trained in a few days, and many larger retailers offer formal web-based and computer-based classroom training to familiarize workers with company guidelines and the equipment with which they will work. Cashiers may require slightly more in-house training in order to supervise and oversee the smooth operation of multiple self-checkout stations. Meatcutters and bakers can attend training courses provided by trade schools and industry associations, but they can also learn the necessary skills on the job.

College graduates will fill most new management positions. Employers increasingly seek graduates of college and university, junior and community college, and technical institute programs in food marketing, food management, and supermarket management. Many supermarket chains place graduates of these programs, or of bachelor's or master's degree programs in business administration, in various professional positions or management training programs in areas, such as logistics, supply chain, marketing, replenishment, food safety, human resources, and strategic planning. Management trainees start as assistant or department managers and, depending on experience and performance, may advance to positions of greater responsibility. It is not unusual for managers to supervise a large number of employees early in their careers.

Courtesy clerks or baggers sometimes advance to work as delicatessen service clerks, stock clerks, order fillers, or perhaps cashiers. Sometimes, workers rotate assignments in a supermarket; for example, a stock clerk might occasionally weigh and give out delicatessen meats. Union contracts, however, often have strict occupational definitions in some stores, making movement among departments difficult.

Grocery store management has become increasingly complex and technical. Managers of some large supermarkets are responsible for millions of dollars in yearly revenue and for hundreds of employees. They use sophisticated software to manage budgets, schedule work, track and order products, price goods, control inventory, manage shelf space, and assess product profitability. Entry-level workers may advance to management positions, depending on experience and performance. Stores that promote from within have established tracks by which workers move from department to department, gaining broad experience, until they are considered ready for an entry-level management position. Opportunities for advancement to management jobs exist in both large supermarket chains and in small, independent grocery stores.

Grocery store jobs call for various personal attributes. Almost all workers must be in good physical condition. Because managers, cashiers, stock clerks and order fillers, and other workers on the sales floor constantly deal with the public, a neat appearance and a pleasant, businesslike manner are important. Cashiers and stock clerks and order fillers must be able to do repetitious work swiftly and accurately. Cashiers need basic arithmetic skills, good hand-eye coordination, and manual dexterity. Stock clerks and order fillers, especially, must be in good physical condition because of the lifting, crouching, and climbing that they do. For managers, good communication skills as well as the ability to solve problems quickly and to perform well under pressure are important. In addition, personal qualities such as initiative, attention to detail, and leadership ability are essential for managers.

Outlook

Wage and salary employment in grocery stores is expected to increase about 7 percent by the year 2014, compared with the 14 percent growth projected for all industries combined. Many additional job openings will arise from the need to replace workers who transfer to jobs in other industries, retire, or stop working for other reasons. Replacement needs are particularly significant due to the industry's large size and the high turnover rate among cashiers and other workers who do not choose to pursue long-term grocery industry careers.

Employment will grow as the population increases and as more grocery stores offer a wider array of goods and services that include prescription drugs, drycleaning, film developing, flowers, liquor, and carryout food, as well as banking, postal, and catering services. Grocery stores are adding and enhancing delicatessens, bakeries, and meat and seafood departments to accommodate the trend toward eating away from home; stores are also adding ready-to-eat-meals to compete with fast-food restaurants. The trend toward opening supercenters, where a myriad of products and services are available at a single location, is increasingly popular. These expansions are expected to create many new jobs.

Some technological advances—such as computer-scanning cash registers and automated warehouse equipment—have boosted productivity, but these innovations are not expected to adversely affect employment levels. In fact, past technological improvements like scanners and electronic data interchange are expected to improve opportunities in areas such as category management and distribution.

Increasing competition from large discount department stores and supercenters will either force smaller independent grocery stores to sell out to larger ones, or, at a minimum, encourage the industry to become more efficient by adopting new technologies and procedures that eliminate redundancies, especially in the supply chains.

Increasingly, many stores let customers process their own transactions with almost no interaction with a cashier. The growing use of self-checkout machines at grocery stores may have an adverse effect on employment of cashiers. This trend, however, will depend largely on the public's acceptance of automated checkouts. Thus far, self-checkouts have been popular, but the popularity is concentrated among individuals who purchase only a few items or who seek to minimize the length of time spent in stores.

Another technology which may also impact employment of cashiers is radio frequency identification (RFID). This technology allows universal bar codes to be replaced with microchips on individual items, thereby allowing entire shopping carts to be instantaneously scanned, fully automating the checkout process. Such automation, however, would initially appear only at larger supermarkets due to the cost, and is years away from being implemented.

On the other hand, many other tasks, such as stocking shelves on the sales floor or helping a customer find a product, cannot be performed effectively by machines. In addition, many consumers have demonstrated their strong desire for personal services. For example, consumers want managers to answer questions about store policy and services; they want cashiers and courtesy clerks to answer questions, bag goods, or help them bring groceries to their cars; and they want workers in specialty departments to advise them on their purchases and fill personal

orders by providing custom cuts of meat, fish, or poultry.

Projected growth for some grocery store occupations differs from the 7 percent growth projected for the industry as a whole. For example, employment of bakers and workers in food preparation and serving related occupations is expected to grow faster than the industry because of the popularity of freshly baked breads and pastries, carryout food, and catering services. With cost cutting in mind, however, some supermarkets may outsource bakery services to small specialty bakeries, thus shifting demand from large chain supermarkets to specialty bakery shops.

Electronic shopping currently is gaining in popularity across the country. Growth of online grocery shopping, however, should remain modest as a result of several factors, including logistical complications, particularly in rural areas, and the expense of delivering perishable goods in a timely manner.

Unlike many other industries, the grocery industry is not highly sensitive to changes in economic conditions. Even during periods of recession, demand for food is likely to remain relatively stable.

Earnings

Average weekly earnings in grocery stores are considerably lower than the average for all industries, reflecting the large proportion of entry-level, part-time jobs. In May 2004, nonsupervisory workers in grocery stores averaged \$332 a week, compared with \$529 a week for all workers in the private sector. Earnings in selected occupations in grocery stores appear in table 2.

Managers receive a salary, and often a bonus, based on store or department performance. Managers in highly profitable stores generally earn more than those in less profitable stores.

Full-time workers generally receive typical benefits, such as paid vacations, sick leave, and health and life insurance. Part-time workers who are not unionized may receive few benefits. Unionized part-time workers sometimes receive partial benefits. Grocery store employees may receive a discount on purchases.

Over 22 percent of all employees in grocery stores belong to a union or are covered by union contracts, compared with 14 percent in all industries. Workers in chain stores are more likely to be unionized or covered by contracts than workers in independent grocery stores. In independent stores, wages often are determined by job title, and increases are tied to length of job service and to job performance. The United Food and Commercial Workers International Union is the primary union representing grocery store workers.

Table 2. Median hourly earnings of the largest occupations in grocery stores, May 2004

Occupation	Grocery stores	All industries
First-line supervisors/managers of retail sales workers	\$15.08	\$15.73
Butchers and meat cutters	13.00	12.45
Retail salespersons	9.24	8.98
Stock clerks and order fillers	8.94	9.66
Customer service representatives	8.69	12.99
Combined food preparation and serving workers, including fast food	8.59	7.06
Food preparation workers	8.54	8.03
Laborers and freight, stock, and material movers, hand	8.25	9.67
Cashiers	7.90	7.81
Packers and packagers, hand	7.07	8.25

Sources of Additional Information

For information on job opportunities in grocery stores, contact individual stores or the local office of the State employment service.

General information on careers in grocery stores is available from:

- United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, Education Office, 1775 K St. NW., Washington, DC 20006-1502.
- Food Marketing Institute, 655 15th St. NW., Suite 700, Washington, DC 20005. Internet: <http://www.fmi.org>
- National Association of Convenience Stores, 1605 King St., Alexandria, VA 22314.

Information on most occupations in grocery stores, including the following, appears in the 2006-07 *Occupational Outlook Handbook*:

- Advertising, marketing, promotions, public relations, and sales managers
- Building cleaning workers
- Cashiers
- Chefs, cooks, and food preparation workers
- Demonstrators, product promoters, and models
- Food and beverage serving and related workers
- Food-processing occupations
- Food service managers
- Human resources, training, and labor relations managers and specialists
- Material moving occupations
- Pharmacists
- Pharmacy aides
- Pharmacy technicians
- Purchasing managers, buyers, and purchasing agents
- Retail salespersons
- Sales worker supervisors
- Stock clerks and order fillers