



# FIRST Union supermarket and grocery workers' survey, 2024

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FIRST Union represents more than 10,000 supermarket and retail grocery workers across all major brands in Aotearoa.

In May 2024, FIRST Union circulated an online survey to supermarket worker members. The survey was distributed digitally to over 9,000 recipients via SurveyMonkey to the union's supermarket and retail grocery worker membership.

There were 1,514 respondents to the survey over a two-week period. No questions were mandatory. 14 of the 16 questions received responses by more than 98 percent of survey participants.

A number of initial [demographic questions](#) looked at workers' [employer](#), [location](#) and [experience](#) in the role. The majority of questions focused primarily on their [conditions of employment](#) and attitudes to their employment.

Survey results are summarised below around the following key themes: [overall satisfaction](#), [understaffing](#), [pay and the cost of living](#), [safety](#), and [security of hours](#).

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## Why did FIRST Union conduct this survey?

Comments by Rudd Hughes, FIRST Union National Secretary for Retail and Finance

Following the current National-ACT-NZ First Government's reckless decision to repeal Fair Pay Agreement legislation immediately after their election and cancel already-initiated fair pay talks between supermarket employees and employers, the wellbeing of workers in the industry is under threat and a major pathway to progress has been closed.

With no single mechanism to ensure fair pay and consistency across the supermarket industry, FIRST Union members must return to individual Collective Agreement (CA) negotiations with each supermarket brand. While the largest employer (Countdown/Woolworths) holds a single CA with its entire retail workforce, other brands require many individual negotiations in single stores across the country. FIRST Union has been party to many different CAs with individual Foodstuffs sites, for example. Despite recent confirmation that Foodstuffs' two cooperative entities (for the North and South Islands) intend to merge into a single entity, the business does not appear to hold the same desire for efficiency within its many prolonged bargaining periods, or for reducing its considerable expenditure on expensive employment consultants and lawyers across the country.

This FIRST Union survey will be used to inform national bargaining standards across all supermarket brands, inform the wider public about the issues supermarket and grocery workers are dealing with, and provide a basis in data for future negotiations with Government and employers on a potential replacement for Fair Pay Agreement legislation.

*"They are actively "restructuring" all departments to lower peoples' pay, hours, or removing the jobs entirely. No one is safe. We are forced to work on the absolute bare minimum hours required to keep the store functioning (barely) and customers are becoming increasingly frustrated, over it, and dangerous. They implement policies that are clearly created by people who don't have to nor have ever worked on a shop floor... I don't have faith that my position or hours are secure or that they will ever give us back enough hours to keep the store running in a safe and secure way... It's always the front-line staff put on the line with no regard for our mental and physical wellbeing.*

– Anon survey response

## Demographic questions

### Employer

90.1 percent of respondents were from a Countdown or Woolworths supermarket.

7.8 percent of respondents were from a Foodstuffs supermarket (3.9 percent New World and 3.8 percent Pak N Save).

Other responses were from Farro Fresh, Fresh Choice, Costco and “Other”

### Location

Respondents were asked which of the 16 NZ regions they were employed in.

The most common regions were Auckland (24.4 percent), Canterbury (15.4 percent), Wellington (10.8 percent), followed by Waikato (10.5 percent).

Auckland, Wellington and Canterbury alone accounted for more than half (50.6 percent) of responses.

### Experience

Respondents were asked how long they have worked in their current role. The largest group of respondents had two to five years of experience (26.3 percent), followed by more than 10 years (25.3 percent) then five to ten years (18.8 percent) and one to two years (18.5 percent).

Responses have been collated below:

- 25.3 percent of respondents had more than 10 years of experience in their current role
- 44.1 percent of respondents had more than five years of experience in their current role
- 70.4 percent of respondents had more than two years of experience in their current role
- 89.2 percent of respondents had more than one year of experience in their current role
- 96.3 percent of respondents had more than six months of experience in their current role

*“Staffing levels are horrendous, roles have been made redundant and (those of us) impacted by this have had our pay rate decreased despite our experience. They are making SO much money but getting away with removing people’s jobs and paying them less but still expecting 150% effort... all the while working the job of 2 people because they are consistently understaffed.*

*– Anon survey response*

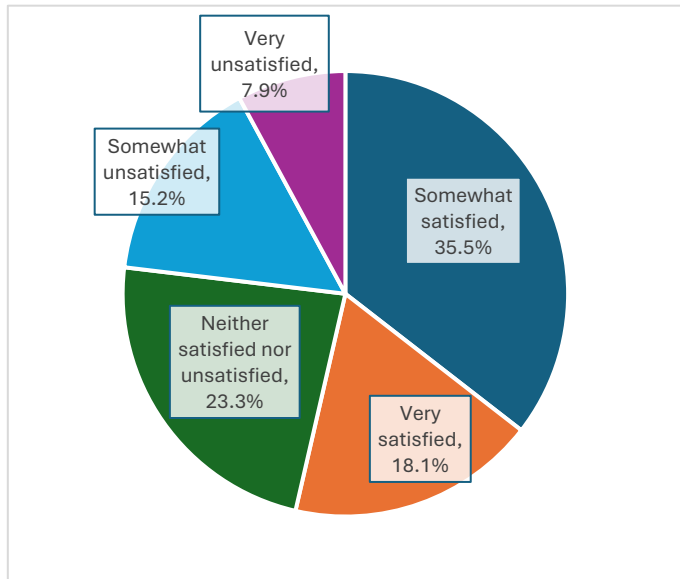
# Employment questions

## Overall satisfaction

The majority (50.7 percent) of surveyed workers were either somewhat satisfied (35.5 percent, the largest group) or very satisfied (18.1 percent) in their current role.

23.1 percent of workers were either somewhat unsatisfied (15.8 percent) or very unsatisfied (7.9 percent).

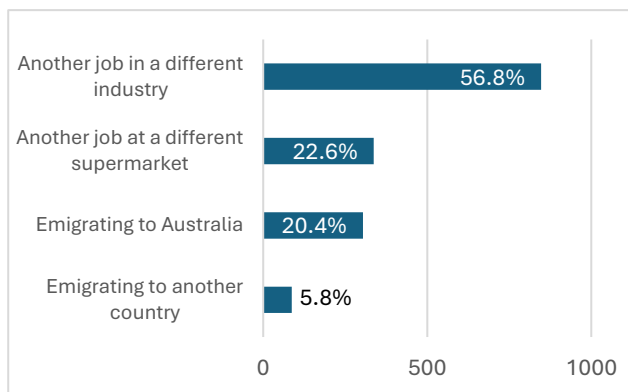
Surveyed workers at New World were the least satisfied with their current role, with 34.5 percent either somewhat unsatisfied (20.7 percent) or very unsatisfied (13.8 percent).



There was, however, a general feeling that **things were going to get worse for supermarket workers in the next year**, with 55.5 percent thinking things will worsen and 36.6 percent thinking things will stay the same. These feelings were generally consistent across the major brands.

69 percent of supermarket workers have **considered leaving their workplace** over the last two years. These rates are higher at Foodstuffs stores. 83 percent of surveyed workers at New World stores have considered leaving in the past two years, and 71 percent of surveyed workers at Pak N Save stores.

The most common reason for considering leaving was generally to look for another job in a different industry (56.8 percent), while 22.5 percent had considered another job at a different supermarket. More than a fifth of respondents had considered emigrating to Australia, while 5.8 percent had considered emigrating to another country.



## Understaffing

39 percent of workers identified **understaffing** as the “single most important workplace issue for supermarket workers”. This was the most popular option chosen on this question. (Question 14).

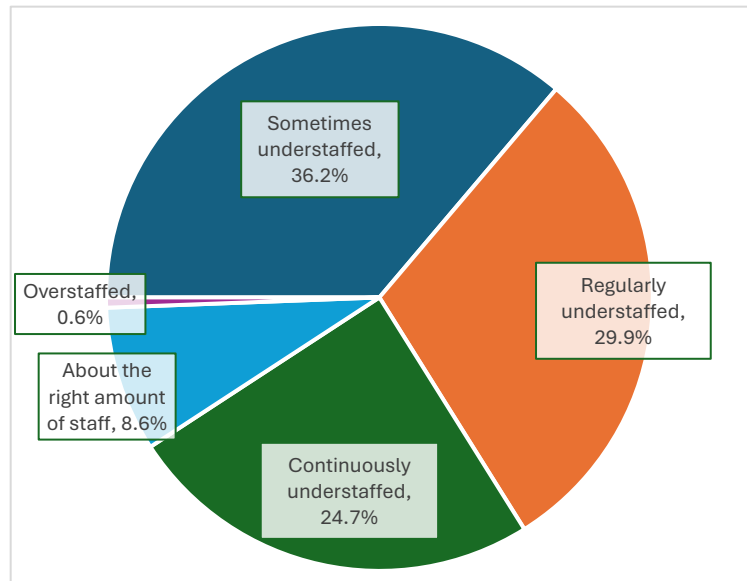
*“Understaffing bleeds into all kinds of issues: staff getting injured, customers getting aggressive, mental health (issues) from stress...”*  
– Anon survey response

This was more pronounced amongst Countdown/Woolworths workers (who make up the majority of survey respondents), 40.1 percent of whom chose understaffing as the single most important workplace issue.

Another question asked about the **level of understaffing** at their store.

90.8 percent of respondents said their stores were understaffed, either “sometimes” (36.2 percent) “regularly” (30 percent) or “continuously” (24.7 percent). These results were relatively consistent across the major brands.

Only 8.6 percent of respondents said their store had about the right amount of staff, while less than one percent believed their store was overstaffed.



*“In the 16 years I have worked for this supermarket, I have never seen it as understaffed as it is now.”*  
– Anon survey response

## Pay and the cost of living

**Low or inadequate pay** was a close second in the “single most important workplace issue for supermarket workers” with 33.7 percent support across all supermarket workers.

It was the most important issue for workers at Foodstuffs supermarkets, chosen by 53.4 percent of respondents at New World supermarkets and 45.6 percent of workers at Pak N Save supermarkets.

**Nearly three-quarters of respondents – 74.4 percent – said that their wages were not sufficient to cover their regular living expenses**, while 25.6 percent of respondents said that their wages were sufficient to cover their regular living expenses. Responses to this question were relatively consistent across the main brands.

	No	Yes
Woolworths/Countdown	74.8%	25.2%
New World	74.1%	25.9%
Pak N Save	70.7%	29.3%

**61.9 percent of respondents felt that their wage increases over the last two years had not kept pace with the rising cost of living.** Only 4.6 percent said their wage increase had kept pace

*“We need a living wage. A lot of us are worked to the bone and our pay does not reflect that. We’re always expected to do better and better but our pay doesn’t get better.”*  
– Anon survey response

with the rising cost of living, while 28.5 percent felt that their wage increases had somewhat kept pace with the rising cost of living.

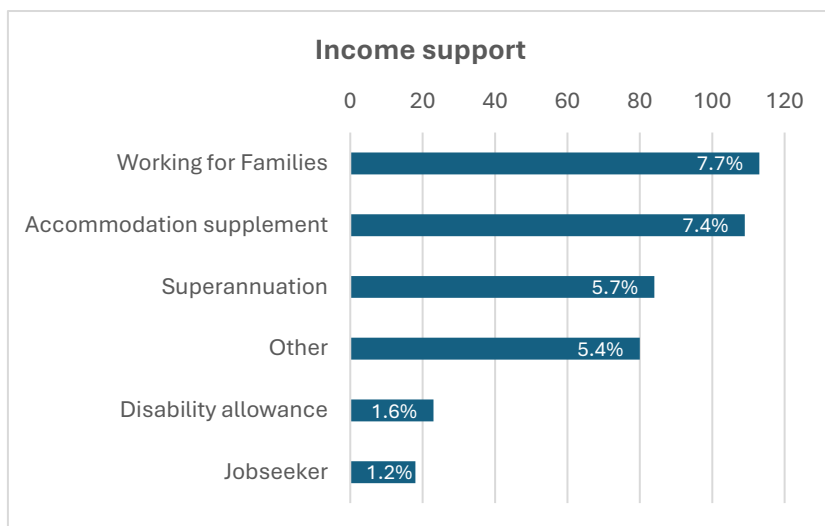
This feeling was even more pronounced at Foodstuffs stores: 78 percent of surveyed New World Workers and 69 percent of surveyed Pak N Save workers felt their wage increases over the last two years had not kept pace with the rising cost of living (14 and 22 percent respectively felt they had “somewhat” kept pace).

*“I started working here when I was 19 years old and am now (in my fifties) and on the same wages as any new person who just starting working (here) at \$23.50 an hour...”*  
 – Anon survey response

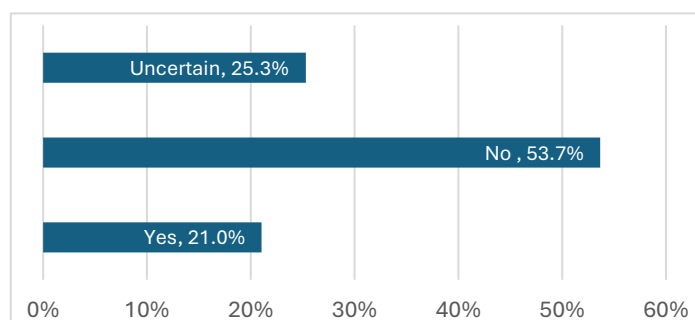
21.2 percent of surveyed workers said they received some form of **income support**. Amongst the major chains, this was lowest at Pak N Save (19 percent), followed by Countdown/Woolworths (25 percent), then New World (32.2 percent).

The most common kinds of income support were working for families (7.7 percent), the accommodation supplement (7.4 percent) and superannuation (5.4 percent).

Roughly a third of workers claimed more than one kind of income support, with the most common combination being working for families and the accommodation supplement.



Only 21 percent of respondents said that **if they received an unexpected \$500 expense tomorrow they could pay it**. 53.7 percent said they could not, and 25.3 percent said they were unsure.



There was some limited variation across the chains, with more (29.3 percent) of New World workers saying they could pay an unexpected \$500 expense tomorrow and more Pak N Save workers (63.8 percent) saying they could not.

## Safety

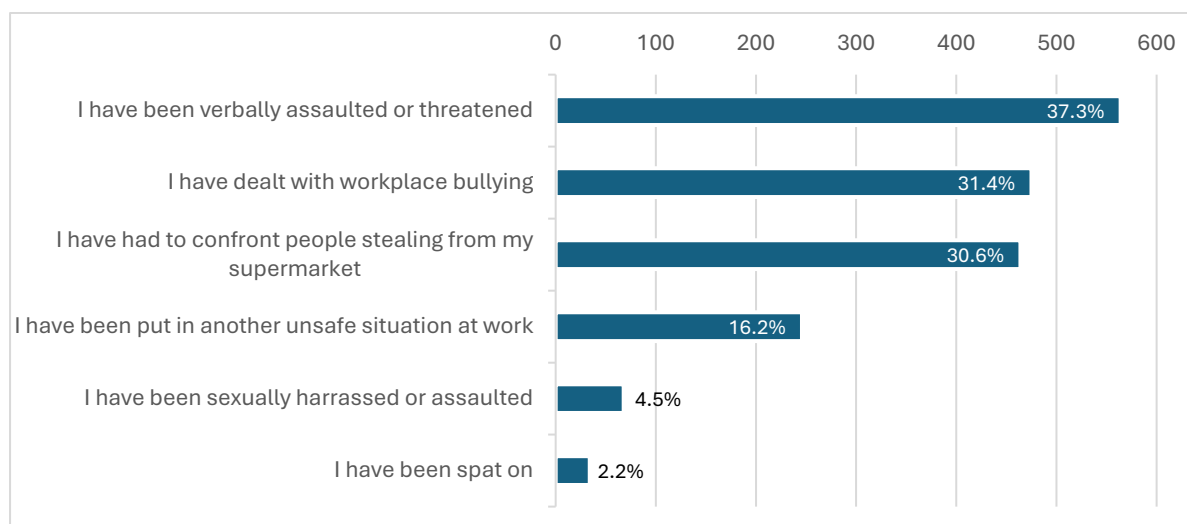
**Customer abuse or aggression** was the third-ranking “single most important workplace issue for supermarket workers” at 11.5 percent, and a further 1.7 percent of workers also identified “poor health and safety standards” as their most important single issue.

*“... customers are becoming more aggressive and unreasonable due to their stress about grocery prices which they take out on staff. It doesn't matter how polite we are, they still lash out verbally.”*

– Anon survey response

Respondents were asked **how often they felt unsafe while at work**. While 60.1 percent of workers either “always” (17 percent) or “usually” (43.2 percent) feel safe on the job, almost a third of workers (30.3 percent) “sometimes” feel unsafe, 5.9 percent “usually” feel unsafe, and 3.7 percent “always” feel unsafe. These numbers appear broadly consistent across the brands.

Another question asked whether workers had been subjected to certain **threatening or dangerous behaviours at work** during the last two years. One third of respondents chose not to respond to this question, while two-thirds noted that they had been subject to the following behaviours:



## Security of hours

2.5 percent of surveyed workers identified insecure hours as the single most important workplace issue for supermarket workers.

28.5 percent of surveyed workers said they were “confident” that their **hours of work were stable and secure**, while a further 27 percent were “somewhat confident” of this. A fifth (20.4 percent) of workers were neutral, with 12.7 percent “somewhat concerned” and a further 11.5 percent “very concerned” that their hours are not stable and secure.

*“The company cuts your hours and expects you to do the same amount of work.”*

– Anon survey response

## Appendix: Full questionnaire text

### 1. Which supermarket or grocery brand do you work for?

Costco | Countdown/Woolworths | Farro Fresh | Fresh Choice | New World | Pak'n'Save | Other

### 2. How long have you worked in your current role?

Less than six months | 6 months - 1 year | 1 - 2 years | 2 - 5 years | 5 - 10 years | More than 10 years

### 3. Which region of New Zealand do you work in?

[16 regional options]

### 4. How sufficient are staffing levels (the number of people working at any given time) in the store you work in?

My store is overstaffed | My store has about the right amount of staff | My store sometimes struggles with understaffing | My store is regularly understaffed | My store is continuously understaffed

### 5. How safe do you feel while you're at work?

I always feel safe at work | I usually feel safe at work | I sometimes feel unsafe at work | I usually feel unsafe at work | I always feel unsafe at work

### 6. Have you dealt with any of the following problems at work in the last 2 years? (please check all that apply)

I have been verbally assaulted or threatened | I have been sexually harassed or assaulted | I have been spat on | I have dealt with workplace bullying | I have had to confront people stealing from my supermarket | I have been put in another unsafe situation at work

### 7. How satisfied are you in your current role, overall?

I'm very satisfied with my role | I'm somewhat satisfied with my role | I'm neither satisfied nor unsatisfied with my role | I'm somewhat unsatisfied with my role | I'm very unsatisfied with my role

### 8. Are your wages sufficient to cover your regular living expenses (e.g. housing, transport, food)?

Yes, my wages are sufficient to meet my regular living expenses | No, my wages are not sufficient to cover my regular living expenses

### 9. If you received an unexpected expense or bill tomorrow for \$500, would you have enough savings to deal with it?

Yes, I could deal with an unexpected expense of \$500 tomorrow if I had to | I'm uncertain whether I could deal with an unexpected \$500 expense tomorrow | No, I could not deal with an unexpected \$500 expense tomorrow

### 10. Do you feel like your wage increases over the last two years have been sufficient to cover the increasing cost of living?



Yes, my wage increases have kept up with the rising cost of living | My wage increases have somewhat covered the rising cost of living, but not entirely | No, my wage increases have not kept up with the rising cost of living | I'm unsure whether or not my wage increases have kept up with the rising cost of living

**11. Do you currently receive any of the following forms of income support beyond your regular wage/salary? (if yes, please check all that apply)**

I receive Working for Families support | I receive an accommodation supplement | I receive a jobseeker benefit | I receive superannuation | I receive a Disability Allowance | I receive another form of income support | No, I don't receive any additional form of income support beyond my regular wage or salary

**12. Have you considered leaving your workplace for any of the following reasons within the last 2 years? (please check all that apply)**

I have considered emigrating to Australia | I have considered emigrating to another country | I have considered getting a new job at a different supermarket | I have considered getting a new job in a different industry | No, I have not considered leaving my current role in the last 2 years for any of these reasons

**13. Thinking about the year ahead, how confident are you that your employer will provide stable working hours that reflect your needs?**

I'm confident my hours are stable and secure | I'm somewhat confident that my hours are stable and secure | I'm neutral or unsure as to whether my hours are stable and secure | I'm somewhat concerned that my hours are not stable and secure | I'm very concerned that my hours are not stable and secure

**14. In your opinion, what's the single most important workplace issue for supermarket workers in New Zealand, generally speaking?**

Low or inadequate pay | Understaffing at work | Customer abuse and aggression | Insecure hours at work | Poor health and safety standards at work | Relationship issues between employers and supermarket workers | Another issue that isn't listed (please enter here)

**15. Thinking overall about your role and the future of the supermarket industry as a whole, do you feel like things are going to get better or worse for supermarket workers in the next year?**

Things will get better | Things will stay the same | Things will worsen

**16. Do you have any additional comments to make regarding supermarket / grocery workers' pay, working conditions or the industry as a whole?**