The national average income per employee in the retail trade in 1997 was $16,953. While the wage levels are low in this sector it is an important entry point for first time job seekers and a viable employment source for those with less skills and qualifications. National wage rates in this sector are highest in Megalopolis and the Far West. A wedge of lower wages is found in the central region of the country with the very lowest rates in the Deep South. Mississippi has the lowest level in the country at $13,986.

In Megalopolis higher than average incomes are found along the central urban spine and surrounding suburban counties. Hunterdon NJ has an average per employee income of $22,394. The differential wage rates refer to the tightness of local job markets Where labor is scarce and expensive rates tend to be higher as employers are forced to pay more to attract people. In affluent counties such as Fairfield CT for example the average rate was $22,550 while in resort/retirement areas such as Nantucket MA the lack of available labor means wages are particularly high, in fact the highest in the whole region at $28,826.

Lower rates are found in the more rural peripheral areas where the local job markets are neither buoyant nor high paying. Berkeley WV and Clarke VA have the lowest rates of only $13,062 and $12,579 respectively.