

Chefs prepare hearty meals but see lean salaries

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Leslie Kwoh/The Star-Ledger



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With all the recent hubbub about chefs, from celebrity cuisinier Bobby Flay to television cook Rachael Ray, just how much does one earn anyway?

Probably not as much as you think — especially with all the belt tightening going on.

Pastry chefs, for example, spent an average of 10 hours a day toiling in the kitchen last year and earned \$48,861, according to a **national survey** released last week.

Sous chefs fared slightly worse, with average earnings of \$42,266, while line cooks made \$29,662.

The 5th-annual StarChefs.com salary survey polled nearly 1,400 culinary professionals across the nation between January and April.

Overall, salaries appeared to be rebounding after a brief slump in 2008, though some job titles still earned far less than before. Chef/owners, the top earners, made on average \$85,685 last year — not a bad salary, but considerably less than the \$94,288 they made in 2007.

"People looking at these figures might not understand that it takes a long time and a lot of hard work to get there," said Laura Curtis, a spokeswoman for StarChefs.com, an online magazine.

"It can be a very lucrative career, but there's a lot that goes into it."

The industry, however, remains considerably less lucrative for women and minorities.

Women chefs earned on average \$54,400 last year, compared to \$71,200 for men.

Women were also one-tenth as likely to be executive chefs, and one-third as likely to be chef/owners.

In the executive chef category, Caucasians earned the highest salary, at \$80,000, followed by Asians and Hispanics, both around \$75,000. Black executive chefs earned the least, at \$54,900.

The survey also found culinary degrees reap few salary benefits.

Degree holders earned on average \$67,900 last year, only \$300 more than non-degree holders.

Location, on the other hand, played a big role in determining paychecks. Pastry chefs earned more in Florida than in New York, but Miami beat out Manhattan as the best locale for executive chefs. California ranked last for sous chefs.

Meanwhile, executive chef salaries increased significantly in San Francisco, Miami and Chicago — a sign of the burgeoning culinary cultures there, Curtis said.