How many people does it take to make an ordinary wooden pencil?

The International Pencil
Incense-cedar trees are used because their fine grain, soft wood, and low resin content.
Lumber jacks in Oregon and northern California cut down cedar trees.
The limbs are cut off of the tree.
The logs are loaded onto trucks ...
... and delivered to a mill in San Leandro California.
Trucks run on diesel fuel.
Where do we get the crude oil needed to make diesel gas?
Much of the oil imported into the U.S. comes from OPEC countries like Saudi Arabia.
At the mill in San Leandro, the logs are cut into rectangular blocks called slats. Each slat is 7 inches (17.78 centimeters) long and 3 inches (7.62 centimeters) wide, and one-quarter inch (0.63 centimeters) thick -- half the thickness of a pencil.
CalCedar Incense-cedar Slats

CalCedar brand Incense-cedar pencil slats represent the premier quality wood casing available to the pencil industry today. Our customers use these slats to produce their highest quality cosmetic pencils, colored and graded graphite artist pencils and premium quality writing pencils. CalCedar slats are produced using Incense-cedar grown in the California and Oregon mountains under the world's most stringent forest management practices.

Click here for CalCedar Incense-cedar slat products.

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The slats are shipped by rail to a factory in Jersey City, New Jersey.
When they arrive at the factory, a machine cuts nine grooves into one side of each slat.

http://www.generalphencil.com/how1l.html
At the factory, resources from around the world are combined to make a pencil.
The “lead” used in pencils is a mixture of graphite, clay, and gums.
Some of the world’s purest graphite comes from the Bogala mine in Sri Lanka

http://www.conceptispuzzles.com/articles/pencil_ratings/pencil_ratings.htm
The graphite is loaded into a cargo container...
… a truck takes the container to the port …
... where the container is unloaded from the truck ...
... and is loaded onto a ship...
… and then heads for the United States …
… through the Suez Canal …
… across the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean
Workers in South Korea built the ship that carries the graphite to the U.S.

The ship is registered in Liberia.
The ship is owned by a French-Dutch joint venture.
When the ship arrives in the United States …
... the container is taken by truck to the pencil factory ...
… where the graphite is unloaded.
Candelilla wax from Mexico is added to make the pencil lead smooth and strong.
http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/waxcamps/techniques.html
The amount of clay used determines the hardness of the lead. Perhaps the clay in your pencil came from Mississippi.
The graphite, clay, and wax are blended together with water for up to three days.

http://generalpencil.com/gpc_ourpencils_how.html
A grey sludge is left behind when the water is squeezed out by a machine.

http://generalpencil.com/gpc_ourpencils_how.html
The dried sludge is ground into a fine powder which is combined with water to make a soft paste. This is pushed through a metal tube to make thin rods.

http://generalpencil.com/gpc_ourpencils_how.html
A machine then puts the pencil lead into the grooves.

http://generalpencil.com/gpc_ourpencils_how.html
Then two slats are glued together to make a “pencil sandwich”.
Nine pencils are carved out of each pencil sandwich.

http://generalpencil.com/gpc_ourpencils_how.html
These plain pencils are then sanded and receive several coats of lacquer.

http://generalpencil.com/gpc_ourpencils_how.html
Castor oil is one of the main ingredients of lacquer. Farmers in tropical Africa grow castor beans.

http://www.ansci.cornell.edu/plants/castorbean.html#description
The black lettering on a pencil is a combination of carbon black and resins.
A plant in Borger, Texas, makes carbon black.
The piece of metal that holds the eraser is called the ferrule. It is made of brass, which is a combination of zinc and copper.

Two thirds of the world’s reserves of zinc are in the U.S., Canada, Australia, the Former Soviet Union, and Ireland.
Sources of copper include Bolivia, Chile, and Zambia
Zambia
copper mine

Zambia
copper refinery
The plug, or eraser, is a combination of many different ingredients including pumice from Italy or Ecuador.

http://generalpencil.com/gpc_ourpencils_how.html
Pumice mine near Quito, Ecuador.
The substance that erases what you have written is the result of a chemical reaction between sulfur chloride and the oil from a seed grown in Indonesia.
So how many people participate in the production of a simple wooden pencil? Far more than anyone would suspect. And only a few of those involved even know that a pencil is the end product of their labor. Through specialization, people from around the world contribute to making your wooden pencil. Without even knowing it, they interact with each other indirectly. How much does this pencil cost? Less than a quarter -- far less than if any single person tried to produce it with no one else’s help. The international pencil is truly a bargain.
People from around the world are involved in making a pencil.
The International Pencil

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"I, Pencil: My Family Tree as told to Leonard E. Read"
and the "How a Mongol Pencil is Made" kit