



Our country's immigration system needs work; this is statement which most Americans, but especially most farmers and ranchers, can heartily agree with. Inaction in Washington has brought us to this point, and it will take action from our elected leaders to start us on a path to a solution.

For many in agriculture the biggest challenge they face today is finding the hired workers they need to run their farms and ranches. After all, it does not matter what Mother Nature throws at you if you do not have the help to pick crops or care for animals through good years and bad. This is a challenge that is faced by lettuce farmers in California, dairy farmers in upstate New York, or, tomato growers in northwest Ohio or citrus farmers in Florida.

It is an issue that impacts communities beyond the farm gate however, since each of the 2 million or so hired farm workers in the U.S. supports two or three other jobs in the sales, marketing and transportation sectors.

[Insert any information on the impact that immigration will have in your state or local area.]

This shortage of workers also bumps up against what is an open secret in agriculture today— that of those 2 million hired employees between 60 and 70 percent are unauthorized to work in the U.S., though these workers typically show employers documents that appear genuine.

The farmers and ranchers do not want to have to keep this open secret—they want a skilled, stable workforce that they can depend on and that is here in the U.S. legally. Unfortunately, they cannot find it.

Even with the recent recession farmers—often offering pay significantly more than minimum wage—still have extreme difficulty finding workers. In many cases, it is not the money that makes these jobs unappealing to many Americans. Rather, the main factor is the seasonal and often transitory nature of the work. Most people do not want a job that last only six weeks; far fewer want to travel across the country from south to north each year following the harvest seasons.

Existing guest worker programs, like the H-2A program, could, in theory, offer an avenue to find workers. Unfortunately, the program has become a bureaucratic nightmare that supplies less than 7 percent of the workers needed on-farm.

To respond to this need, a group of about 70 organizations representing agricultural employers came together, forming the Agricultural Workforce Coalition (AWC), to speak with one voice and to find a path forward on immigration reform. The AWC feels any proposal must deal with both current experienced agricultural workers as well as provide for agriculture's future workforce needs. This will ensure America's farmers have access to a stable and secure workforce.

We urge the House of Representatives to act without delay to enact immigration legislation that will provide a boost to American farmers, consumers and workers.