



THE ISSUE:

Instability in the agricultural labor force has reached critical levels. Farmers face a shortage of legally authorized and experienced workers each year and the cumbersome H-2A visa program cannot serve as a safety net to meet the workforce demands. Legislation is needed to provide farmers and ranchers, across all of agriculture, access to a legal and stable workforce.

BACKGROUND:

Farmers have few options in times of labor shortages. Sometimes, they must let crops rot in the fields. Other times farmers have attempted to access the only program that admits foreign workers in agriculture: The H-2A visa program. As the traditional ag workforce shrinks, participation in H-2A has grown. Many producers view it as a last resort. While workable for some in the industry, its inflexibility and the multiple federal agencies involved in the process make it very difficult to access and utilize. In addition, current program interpretation on seasonal work prohibits its use for many segments of agriculture, including dairy and livestock, leaving these industries without a legal mechanism to hire foreign workers.



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The ag labor shortage hurts our competitiveness, local economies and jobs. In fact, every farm worker engaged in high-value labor intensive crop and livestock production sustains two to three off-farm jobs. The activities that occur on domestic farms support not only farmworkers, but also an entire supply chain of transportation providers, input suppliers, processors and consumer retail functions. Many of those jobs would be permanently lost if access to agriculture's current workforce was jeopardized.

THE SOLUTION:

All AWC members agree that those factors, along with an increasingly rigid and burdensome H-2A program, demonstrate the need for a new approach. Reforms to the immigration system can ensure that American agriculture has a legal, stable supply of workers, both in the short- and long-term for all types of agriculture. This requires a legislative solution that provides stability to our labor force through legal status for the current unauthorized and experienced agricultural workforce, and that ensures future needs are met through a new program that will admit a sufficient number of willing and able workers in a timely manner.

We cannot continue to limit farmers' and rural America's economic potential due to labor instability. Therefore, AWC members seek the approach outlined above to ensure a legal, reliable, long-term workforce for all sectors of the industry.

ABOUT THE AGRICULTURE WORKFORCE COALITION:

The Agriculture Workforce Coalition (AWC) brings together organizations representing the diverse needs of agricultural employers across the country. AWC serves as the unified voice of agriculture in the effort to ensure that America's farmers, ranchers and growers have access to a stable and secure workforce. For more information, go to www.agworkforcecoalition.org.

