



Talking Points for Agriculture Workforce Coalition

1. Our **farmers face a critical shortage** of legally authorized and experienced workers, which negatively impacts our economic competitiveness, local economies, and jobs. Every farm worker engaged in high-value labor intensive crop and livestock production **sustains two to three off-farm but farm dependent jobs**. We cannot continue allowing foreign producers to take advantage of our labor crisis.
2. Any solution to agriculture's labor crisis must **help meet the labor needs of agriculture both now and in the future**.
3. The AWC **opposes mandatory E-verify legislation absent any legislation to address agriculture's labor needs**.
4. **We urge your support for immigration reform legislation** to address the crisis facing the agriculture industry.



There is a shortage of U.S. workers willing and able to perform farm work. Farmers, ranchers and growers need a new way to ensure that they can find reliable, skilled, hardworking employees. This framework is a market-based, flexible program that works for all of agriculture.

- A 2012 survey by the California Farm Bureau found that 71 percent of tree fruit growers, and nearly 80 percent of raisin and berry growers, were unable to find an adequate number of employees to prune trees or vines or pick the crop.
- The problem exists for all facets of agriculture, beyond just fruits, vegetables and nuts. A separate Texas A&M study in 2015 focused on dairy, and found that farms using immigrant labor supply more than 79 percent of the milk in the country. Without these employees, economic output would decline by \$32.1 billion and 208,208 workers would lose their jobs.
- The shortage of farm workers has several causes, including the reverse migration of workers from the U.S. to Mexico, historic levels of immigration enforcement and bipartisan congressional commitment to a credible work authorization system through mandatory E-Verify. These factors have contributed to and will exacerbate this shortage if an immediate solution is not enacted as part of immigration reform.

The only means of addressing domestic labor shortages in agriculture currently available is the H-2A temporary and seasonal foreign agricultural workforce program.

- The H-2A program is costly, bureaucratic and highly complicated to use. Its extensive rules make it especially difficult for small farmers to use—many employers have to hire lawyers to help them fill out the applications and to protect themselves from costly penalties for minor technical errors.
- However, each year, more and more farms have to use the H-2A program for legal foreign labor to meet their workforce needs. The demand on the program is increasing as producers have nowhere else to turn; yet the administrative weight of the program cannot keep up. H-2A employment has doubled in the past four years and could double again in the next 2 years or less. Even at current levels, capacity and infrastructure issues at the Departments of State, Homeland Security and Labor are leading to greater processing delays than ever before. This means bureaucratic red tape and delays result in workers showing up at the farm well after the date of need, and millions of dollars in agricultural production is lost in the interim.
- It also lacks provisions to help producers—like dairy/mushrooms/nursery—who hire employees for year-round work.
- The Agriculture Workforce Coalition (AWC) represents a unified agricultural industry seeking an alternative program.



All Americans have a stake in this issue. Without an adequate workforce, it is not just America's farms, ranches and nurseries that will suffer, but the broader economy as well.

- Each of the 1.6 million hired farm employees working on American farms and ranches supports two to three full-time jobs further down the value chain in the food processing, transportation, farm equipment, marketing retail and other sectors.

The Agriculture Workforce Coalition has developed principles that provide a framework program that can help meet both the current and future employment needs of agriculture.

- The framework developed by the AWC moves beyond the problems associated with both H-2A and AgJOBS to develop a program that helps farmers, ranchers and growers hire employees they need, while ensuring compliance with labor regulations that ensures address employees' safety and compensation.
- For current workers without documentation, the framework recommends an adjustment in status that can be earned and is tied to their past work in agriculture, as well as, a future commitment to agriculture.
- Just as important, however, is that any legislation also include a predictable, long-term program to meet the future workforce needs of agriculture as current employees leave to pursue new opportunities.
- This new worker program would eventually supersede the H-2A program, and would provide both producers and their employees with both flexibility and predictability.