



RE: FWMA Talking Points

To: County Farm Bureaus

From: Federal Policy Dept., Sara Neagu-Reed

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Headline Messages

- Reform to our immigration and guest worker program is long overdue. The last time Congress passed meaningful immigration reform for agriculture was over 30 years ago. Farmers and their employees need a system that provides long-term stability.
- Workforce shortages have been one of the greatest limiting factors for growth in California agriculture, and it is time we find a solution that works for all. We believe that H.R. 1603 is the starting point to resolving this issue.
- Farm Bureau has long worked for ag workforce reform that includes:
 - A flexible visa program that allows foreign-born workers to enter the U.S. temporarily to work in agriculture.
 - Provisions that allow current farm employees to earn an adjustment in status and remain working in U.S. agriculture.
- The workforce solution must come from improved federal laws, and the Farm Workforce Modernization Act makes those improvements by fairly addressing existing undocumented workers and providing a better visa program for future workers.

Additional Talking Points

- This comprehensive legislation contains key elements that address current and future workforce needs for agricultural employers and employees in California and throughout the nation.
 - We need to deal fairly with the existing agricultural workforce and their immediate families. The people who work on farms and ranches are valued members of rural communities. They pay taxes and work hard in pursuit of the opportunities our nation provides. Their contributions to our communities and our food system should be recognized by allowing them a chance to gain legal status.
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- Through its provisions, the bill would assure existing employees who do gain legal status will continue to work in agriculture. In fact, it provides them better opportunity to move into more-responsible and supervisory positions on farms and ranches, by allowing them to earn the backstop of legal residency.
 - Improved immigration programs help small farms remain viable by assuring a more stable availability of people to work on farms and ranches. California farmers and ranchers have had chronic trouble hiring enough people. A voluntary CFBF survey earlier this year showed 56% of participating farmers had been unable to hire all the employees they needed at some point during the previous five years—with problems increasing in recent years.
 - Improvements to the H-2A program would make it much more flexible and valuable to California farm employers and employees. The CFBF survey showed only 6% of participating farmers had enrolled in H-2A, because the program just has not worked well for farmers here. An improved program would allow future employees to migrate more easily to and from their home countries and move from farm to farm for employment through a portability option California producers have long sought. Enhancements of the program to include visas for year-round employees would be especially important to dairies, nurseries and other employers that have been unable to use the H-2A program in the past.
 - Portability of H-2A visas represents an important enhancement to the program. Currently, an H-2A visa holder may work for only one employer. Being able to use the visa with more than one agricultural employer would provide valuable flexibility for both employee and employer. Weather, water availability and crop patterns change every year, so our immigration system must allow employees and employers to adapt to those changing conditions.
 - Border security remains an important priority. An improved agricultural immigration system enhances border security. Activating the E-Verify system for agricultural employment would be the final, necessary piece to ensure a legal workforce for agriculture—once an improved system provides for the existing workforce and for a more flexible visa program.
 - In California, agricultural employment totaled 420,400 in 2018, according to the state Employment Development Department, and we believe the vast majority of farm employees to be immigrants. All of us who farm—and all of us who eat—depend on their contributions to the food system. Our immigration laws must recognize and accommodate that.
 - Farm Bureau has been working for more than 25 years to improve the agricultural immigration system. It remains a top priority for our members and for their employees. We will continue to work, for as long as it takes, with members of Congress to assure a stable future for California farmers, ranchers, and their employees.