

IMMIGRATION

Stable Workforce for Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Producers

For more than a decade the produce industry and agriculture partners have worked for legislation to reform our broken immigration system and help build a legal and reliable workforce. The reality of our farm labor force is that most are foreign-born and as many as 75 percent are falsely documented. In addition, this population is aging, without replenishment. The number of full-time equivalent field and crop workers in the U.S. fell by at least 146,000, or more than 20 percent, between 2002 and 2014. Additionally, new data from the Pew Research Center has found that the unauthorized immigrant population in the United States has declined between 2007 and 2016 by 1.5 million, further exacerbating the struggle for agriculture employers to find workers.

During the 115th Congress, the House of Representatives considered a series of immigration workforce reform bills. The most significant of those related to our industry was the Agriculture Guest Worker (AG) Act, legislation advanced by Judiciary Chairman Bob Goodlatte (R-VA). While it had some important provisions, this legislation was amended during the committee process resulting in a bill that was a concern by many in the fresh produce industry.

On the regulatory side, one positive step in 2018 saw the Administration propose reforms to the H-2A program that required employers seeking H-2A workers to advertise in local news publications to give American workers priority. The change will enable employers to advertise electronically instead of paying for newspaper advertising. United Fresh believes it's time for the agricultural sector to work with our allies in Congress to introduce new legislation in January that would truly help us solve the labor crisis we face.

Policy Priorities

- Work with Congress to develop legislation that will address both current workforce and a future-flow guest worker program.
- United Fresh does not support mandatory E-verify programs unless a workable agriculture program is in place.
- Finally, United Fresh will continue to work with the Administration to seek greater modernization of the H2A program. This includes changes to the Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR) as well as the relaxation of burdensome administrative requirements to ensure access to a viable workforce.

Agriculture Labor by the Numbers

- As much as **75%** of our foreign-born labor force is undocumented.
- With an aging population, the number of full-time equivalent field and crop workers fell by at least **146,000**, or more than 20 percent, between 2002 and 2014.
- A report from the Pew Research Center found that **140,000** more Mexicans left the U.S. than those that came here between 2009 and 2014.
- H-2A workers only make up about **10%** of the total workforce needed.
- In 2015, there were **145,864** H-2A workers requested; **74%** more than in 2011. Of that number, **139,832** workers were provided to farms.