WASHINGTON, D.C. (May 6, 2020) – A national coalition of 64 organizations representing specialty crop producers sent a letter to congressional leadership earlier this week highlighting the extraordinary measures agricultural employers are taking to protect their workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Farmers and ranchers across the country moved quickly to implement new employee safety protocols early in this crisis,” said National Council of Agricultural Employers President and CEO Michael Marsh. “While America was being placed on lockdown, agricultural employers were already at work trying to figure out how to best protect their employees and the public,” Marsh continued.

The letter details the collaboration between the agriculture industry, public health experts and regulatory agency officials to develop best safety practices in the field and in packing, processing and cooling facilities.

“Given the strong food safety culture within the fresh produce industry, adapting and expanding our practices to protect workers happened quickly. The industry leveraged general recommendations offered by CDC, OSHA and various state public health agencies, tailoring them to the specialty crop industry as needed to put worker safety first,” stated United Fresh Produce Association President & CEO Tom Stenzel.

Around the country, agricultural organizations have worked with farmers and ranchers to develop industry-specific training materials and programs to educate both the employer and the employee on critical guidance related to hygiene and sanitation, social distancing and other recommendations to protect essential workers and slow the spread of COVID-19.

“Like many essential businesses, the agricultural workplace has responded in real time to evolving public health directives,” noted Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association President Mike Joyner. “Employees are the critical element to all agricultural operations, and employee safety is both a moral and financial imperative for farmers and ranchers,” Joyner continued.

As future rounds of COVID-19 pandemic legislation are debated, the coalition letter urges congressional leaders to acknowledge the widespread employee protection protocols already in place on American farms and ranches, and to provide additional support to help agricultural employers meet the needs of their employees.

“Farmers and ranchers are striving daily to ensure the welfare of their employees, in order to safeguard our food supply and bolster or nation’s response to COVID-19,” said Western Growers President and CEO Dave Puglia. “We are calling on Congress to extend current relief efforts for agriculture, and to
include additional funding for personal protective equipment and other measures to offset the costs of maintaining an essential workforce during the pandemic,” Puglia continued.

Click here to read the full letter.

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