

Ag Labor and Immigration - We Need to Get It Right

From: The Honorable David G. Valadao

Sent By: jessica.butler@mail.house.gov

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Dear Colleagues:

As Representatives of agricultural Congressional Districts in California, we understand the critical importance of the agriculture industry in cultivating our nation's economy. The agricultural labor crisis threatens jobs on and off the farm. It is undermining American food security. We heartily believe it is time for the House of Representatives to act on broad and meaningful immigration reform that includes a balanced solution to the agricultural labor crisis.

The House Judiciary Committee is scheduled to consider several immigration measures this week, including Chairman Goodlatte's H.R. 1773, the Agricultural Guest Worker Act. While we believe the Chairman's effort is well-intended, in its current form this bill does not present a solution that addresses the diverse challenges and situations confronting the agriculture industry, nor does it provide a fair and balanced approach for our experienced farm workers.

H.R. 1773 would replace the existing but antiquated H-2A agricultural temporary worker program with a new H-2C program. We share the view that H-2A does not work for most growers and producers. We agree that it should be replaced. However, H.R.1773 retains an inflexible H-2A-like structure that falls far short of our historic opportunity to get reform right this time. It fails to provide an acceptable market-oriented portable visa option, a concept that is supported by farm employers and farm workers alike. Finally, we harbor serious doubts that the program will appeal to many of our current, experienced workers. Without a realistic program structure that includes incentives for these workers to remain in agriculture, legislation will fail to stabilize the farm labor crisis in the near term. Our producers will also face tremendous delays and uncertainty given the challenges of processing hundreds of thousands of needed workers through the limited bandwidth in our consulates abroad.

It is time to move forward, not backward. Congress must work together to find middle ground that benefits both the temporary guest workers as well as the agricultural employers. Final legislation must create incentives for farm workers to continue to work in the industry so that the United States can continue to feed the world. We believe in a comprehensive approach to immigration reform that includes earned legal status. This approach is critical for our country, our families, and our economy.

At present, H.R.1773 does not present a promising solution for our farmers and farm workers. We look forward to working with our colleagues in the House toward the goal of enacting a comprehensive approach to our nation's immigration problems, including a strong and balanced solution for the agricultural sector.

Sincerely,

David G. Valadao

Member of Congress

Sam Farr

Member of Congress

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