



March 11, 2024

Hon. Eric A. “Rick” Crawford
Member of Congress and Co-Chair,
Agriculture Labor Working Group

Hon. Donald G. Davis
Members of Congress and Co-Chair,
Agriculture Labor Working Group

(Delivered via email)

Representatives Crawford and Davis:

Western Growers members grow, pack and ship more than half of the country’s fresh produce. Our members are based in California, Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico and many have farming and processing operations in other states across the U.S. On their behalf, I wish to thank you, Chair Thompson and Ranking Member Scott, and the other 12 Representatives who served on the Agriculture Labor Working Group (ALWG).

The report issued by the ALWG on March 7, 2024, presents a thoughtful and constructive policy roadmap to address several of the most damaging aspects of the farm labor crisis. The persistent and worsening shortage of labor for many sectors in the agricultural industry has collided with rapidly rising wage costs for employers forced to utilize the H-2A program to secure temporary foreign workers. The fallout takes many forms. For example, America is increasingly dependent on imported fresh produce as the cost structure for domestic production, driven in large part by labor costs, continues to advantage foreign producers. Within our own membership, these and other regulatory factors are forcing farm consolidation which increasingly results in multi-generational family farms giving way to private equity investors.

In several areas the report cites provisions of the Farm Workforce Modernization Act (H.R. 4708), notably including the wage formula for employers utilizing the H-2A program. As you know, had the Farm Workforce Modernization Act (FWMA) become law, farmers employing H-2A workers would have saved \$1 billion in wage costs in 2023 and another \$1.8 billion through 2024. The H-2A wage rate today would be 12.7 % lower on a national average had that legislation become law.

The FWMA was far from perfect in our eyes, and included provisions we would oppose on a standalone basis. Yet we strongly supported it and advocated for its approval, as did dozens of labor-intensive agricultural industry associations. The United Farm Workers union would say the same, although their concerns differed from ours. Yet the union also strongly supported FWMA and advocated for its passage. Durable legislation is produced by such difficult compromises.

It remains a highly regrettable lost opportunity that the Senate did not take up this legislation after the House passed it with bipartisan support, twice in successive years.

We hope the work of the ALWG will serve as a bright light of hope for all who worry that policy-focused bipartisan collaboration on difficult and consequential issues in the Congress is a thing of the past. More tangibly, we suggest that the work of the ALWG can help to refocus your colleagues in the House, and especially those serving on the committees of jurisdiction, on the urgent task at hand.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Dave Puglia
President & CEO

Cc: Hon. Glenn "G.T." Thompson
Hon. David Scott
Hon. Lori Chavez-DeRemer
Hon. Monica De La Cruz
Hon. Doug LaMalfa
Hon. Nicholas A. Langworthy
Hon. David Rouzer
Hon. Derrick Van Orden
Hon. Yadira Caraveo
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Hon. Jim Costa
Hon. Jasmine Crockett
Hon. Darren Soto
Hon. Gabe Vasquez