



AMERICAN AGRI-WOMEN 2022

AGRICULTURAL LABOR AND IMMIGRATION

ISSUE: The ongoing labor shortage for agriculture and the broader U.S. labor market continues. Agricultural organizations continue to plead with the federal government to solve the ag labor crisis. Which can only be achieved through bipartisan immigration legislation.

One roadblock to a solution is the situation at the southern border and the political debate how to handle it. Some elected officials believe that providing immigration reform will alleviate border surges, while others will not pursue changes without first solving the border issue.

AMERICAN AGRI-WOMEN REQUEST: Congress must work together to pass legislation that would provide stability for the current agricultural workforce and make sufficient improvements to the agricultural guest worker program so that the U.S. agricultural industry can continue to provide good healthy food for generations to come. The bipartisan House-passed Farm Workforce Modernization Act is on the right track, and we urge the Senate to act NOW, make necessary improvements and pass its version of the ag labor reform bill.

BACKGROUND:

The ag labor crisis is not new to anyone. The current agricultural workforce is estimated to be nearly fifty percent undocumented and perpetually runs the risk of loss of employment. We cannot run the risk of E-Verify implementation without first providing stability to existing agricultural workforce. The current Temporary Agricultural Program (H-2A) is complicated and expensive, but due to the diminishing and aging labor supply, more and more growers utilize the program every year. For those who can participate in the program, the current bureaucratic process sometimes leads to harmful delays of guest worker arrivals. Many agricultural sectors however, including dairy and other year-round operations face the same labor shortages but do not yet have access to the program. Participation in the program requires payment of its own special minimum wage (Adverse Effect Wage Rate) that has caused wages to increase at a much higher rate than any other sectors. The H-2A program will continue to be necessary for American agriculture to survive, but this cumbersome program requires a much-needed update.