



Maryland Farm Bureau[®]

ISSUES FACT SHEET

Labor

ISSUE

Farmers have long experienced difficulty in obtaining workers who are willing and able to work on farms and in fields. Jobs in agriculture are physically demanding, conducted in all seasons and are often transitory.

BACKGROUND

In times of labor shortages, farmers have relied on foreign workers, who are admitted under a government sponsored temporary worker program known as H-2A, and on workers who appear to have legal status to be working in the United States. The demand for foreign workers is heightened due to not only a lack of a willing domestic workforce, but also the reverse migration of workers from the U.S. to Mexico, historic levels of immigration enforcement and bipartisan congressional commitment to a credible work authorization system through mandatory E-Verify. Those factors, combined with an increasingly rigid and burdensome H-2A program, demonstrate the need for a new approach.

Past legislative proposals (e.g. AgJOBS, HARVEST Act, BARN Act and other bills) have attempted to reform the H-2A program to ensure a future workforce in agriculture. However, it is apparent that those proposals are no longer viable to meet agriculture's needs.

Multiple H-2A regulatory changes and rigid program administration have made use of an already difficult program nearly impossible. A national survey conducted by the National Council of Agricultural Employers of H-2A employers under the current rules showed that administrative delays result in workers arriving on average 22 days after the date of need causing an economic loss of nearly \$320 million for farms that hire H- 2A workers. Costly recruitment requirements result in less than 5 percent of those referred by the government working the entire contract period.

POSITION

We support reforms to the immigration system that ensure a legal, stable supply of workers, both in the short and long-term for all types of agriculture. We also support maximum opportunity for youth to work on farms. We oppose overtime wages to farm workers who work less than 60 hours per week.

For more information, visit www.mdfarmbureau.com/labor.