



POLICY DEVELOPMENT BRIEF

Immigration/Ag Labor

July 16, 2008

ISSUE

The ability of agricultural employers to obtain legal foreign workers is clearly one of the most important issues ever to face agriculture. Interior enforcement, border security and immigration reform has consistently been in the headlines and has elicited fierce debate.

Current policy has served us well and allowed us to speak consistently on the need for the use of legal foreign workers. There may be other issues dealing with immigration or agriculture labor that you may identify as worthy of policy development.

BACKGROUND

Farmworkers make up a third of the total agricultural labor force and are critical to U.S. agricultural production, particularly in labor-intensive sectors such as fruits and vegetables. Recent economic and demographic trends, such as changing agricultural production methods that permit year-round employment, expanding immigrant populations in nonmetropolitan counties, and growing concerns over U.S. immigration policies, have sparked heated interest in the subject.

Bob Stallman, President of American Farm Bureau recently said, "Farmers and ranchers are experiencing a serious tightening in labor. This issue impacts every facet of the agricultural community – dairy producers, fruit and vegetable growers, poultry and hog farmers, row croppers, nurserymen and others. We need stability in our labor situation as we strive to get food on America's tables and work to solve the immigration problem".

Administration Action

Congress has failed to pass meaningful immigration reform legislation in over two decades. Current temporary worker programs are flawed, and agricultural employers are often put in the difficult situation of not having a sufficient supply of legal foreign workers.

Because of Congressional inaction, the Bush Administration has recently taken several administrative actions in an effort to strengthen border security, enforce worksite laws and to increase the supply of legal workers.

- Funding for border security and immigration enforcement has increased by 159% to \$12.3 billion in 2008.
- Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has replaced the old approach of administrative hearings and fines for employers who knowingly hire illegal aliens with a much tougher combination of criminal prosecutions and asset forfeitures.
 - Arrests for criminal violations brought in worksite enforcement actions have increased from 19 in FY 2001 to 863 in FY 2007. ICE also made 4,077 administrative arrests in FY 2007, for a total of 4,940 arrests.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT BRIEF: IMMIGRATION



- In FY 2007, DHS obtained more than \$31 million in criminal fines, restitutions and civil judgments as a result of worksite enforcement.
- The E-Verify program is helping more than 48,000 companies verify the employment eligibility of newly hired employees.

Congressional Action

Farm Bureau strongly supports the Emergency Agriculture Relief Act introduced by Sen. Feinstein (D-California) and Sen. Larry Craig (R-Idaho). The bill would provide temporary limited immigration status to experienced farm workers with a cap of 1.35 million workers, who can continue to work in American agriculture for the next five years. Eligibility would be limited to experienced farm workers who can prove agricultural employment for at least 150 days (or 863 hours) or who have earned at least \$7,000 working U.S. agriculture during the past 48 months.

CURRENT POLICY

FFBF Policy

111. Legal Foreign Workers

The use of legal foreign workers is critical to the sustainability of agriculture in Florida and needs to be assured, simplified and cost-competitive to make their employment more feasible for agriculture. (LABOR)

107. Immigration at the Federal Level

Recognizing that immigration is a federal issue, we oppose immigration legislation, ordinances or rules at the state or local level. (LABOR)