



Immigration reform must provide flexibility, farm leader says

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April 17, 2013

As California farmers and ranchers continue to report problems hiring enough people to tend and harvest crops and livestock, the leader of the state's largest farm organization said immigration legislation before Congress must provide the flexibility needed by both farmers and their employees.

California Farm Bureau Federation President Paul Wenger thanked the U.S. senators who introduced immigration-reform legislation today.

"We're gratified the senators made the agricultural workforce a priority," Wenger said. "Everyone agrees that the current system is broken. It doesn't work for farmers or for people who want to come to the United States to work on farms. An improved agricultural immigration system will enhance border security and assure steady supplies of American-grown food."

Improvements to the immigration system, he said, must account for the unpredictable, seasonal labor needs on farms in California and throughout the nation.

"With weather, water availability and crop patterns changing every year, farmers must be able to hire people when they're needed, and employees need to be able to move freely from crop to crop and area to area as harvests shift," Wenger said. "Immigration rules need to be straightforward and easy to implement, for both farm employers and prospective employees."

He noted that nearly two-thirds of farmers who responded to a CFBF survey last year said they experienced challenges finding enough employees, and said farmers have already reported similar problems this year.

"Farmers have made repeated efforts to hire people from within the domestic workforce, but it's clear that for the foreseeable future we will depend on people from other countries to do the bulk of farm work," Wenger said.

He noted that Congress plans to require farmers to verify employee eligibility through the E-Verify system, making it particularly important for legislation to include an immigration system that recognizes the need for a stable, legal agricultural workforce.

"The new legislation gives us a chance to modernize the agricultural immigration system and we must make the most of that opportunity," Wenger said.

The California Farm Bureau Federation works to protect family farms and ranches on behalf of more than 74,000 members statewide and as part of a nationwide network of more than 6.2 million Farm Bureau members.

Contact

Phone: 916/561-5550

news@cfbf.com

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California Farm Bureau Federation, 2300 River Plaza Drive, Sacramento, CA 95833
Phone: (916) 561-5500, Fax: (916) 561-5699, General Information: cfbf@cfbf.com
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