

Senate framework on immigration reform encourages California farmers

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With farmers across California reporting chronic problems in hiring enough people to tend and harvest crops, the leader of the state's largest farm organization welcomed today's release of a bipartisan framework for comprehensive immigration reform in the U.S. Senate.

"We're encouraged that our elected officials acknowledge the immigration issues that face the nation and in particular farmers and their employees, and that immigration reform will be a priority this year," California Farm Bureau Federation President Paul Wenger said. "Farmers struggle to hire enough domestic employees, so they rely on foreign employees willing to harvest America's food. Many of the people who tend to the food we eat are not properly documented. Reform of immigration laws should secure our borders and allow immigrants who are contributing to our communities to work in farming."

Wenger said he is pleased that the plan announced today includes a pledge to secure the border while crafting a workable immigration program for agriculture. He noted that in an online survey conducted by Farm Bureau last year, California farmers and ranchers described continuing problems in finding enough people to take on-farm jobs.

"Nearly two-thirds of the farmers who responded to our survey described significant problems hiring enough employees," Wenger said. "We learned that not having a workable immigration program for agricultural employees affects farmers throughout the state and across an array of crops, especially fruits and vegetables. California's future as the nation's leading source of nutritious fruits and vegetables relies on a steady workforce—and immigration reform is the only solution."

As a new harvest season begins, Wenger said, it's important for Congress to work on a solution sooner rather than later. He added that the California Farm Bureau, as part of the newly formed Agriculture Workforce Coalition and as a partner in the American Farm Bureau Federation, is focused on enacting reform this year.

"It's important that any agricultural immigration program provide the flexibility needed for the large variety of fruits, vegetables, crops and livestock grown by American farmers," Wenger said. "What we've seen today from the bipartisan group of senators reflects movement in the right direction for reform, and Congress must keep moving forward."

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.

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