GrowNYC's FARMroots provides aspiring and established farmers with business technical assistance and training designed to ensure the long-term viability of farms and farmland.

**GOP and USDA Prioritize H-2A Overhaul**

by Jack Hornickel

Representative Goodlatte of Virginia has recently introduced the Agricultural Guestworker and Legal Workforce Act of 2018 (H.R. 6417), a legislative act comprised of two bills that would overhaul the H-2A farmworker visa program, as well as require e-Verify on farms. The Act is co-sponsored by 35 representatives, including the six upstate New York Republicans, and it was recently emphasized by Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue as a priority for the American agricultural sector.

While the Act would create more employment opportunities for farmworker visa holders, it would also loosen the employer requirements that benefit them. For example, the new H-2A program would extend eligible employment from seasonal jobs to year-round work, including on dairy farms, and aquaculture operations with food processors, and in slaughterhouses. The new H-2A would also offer three year visas, transferrable among employers. However, for this new flexibility, the Act would also reduce farmworker minimum wage rates- by as much as $4 in some states -and abandon the requirement that employers provide housing and international transportation.

More importantly, the Act tightens the immigration oversight of foreign farm labor. Firstly, the Act requires that farm employers use the e-Verify system within two years; this system electronically checks Social Security Numbers, effectively eliminating the employment of undocumented farmworkers. Secondly, while undocumented farmworkers are invited into the new H-2A program by a process of “pre-qualification,” there is no guarantee that farmworkers would maintain their current jobs and communities or avoid entanglement in the immigration bureaucracy. Finally, even those farmworkers that hold visas would be required to return to their home country periodically, at their own expense, to claim 10% of their wages which employers must withhold and place in bond at the foreign consulate.

Overall, the Act would lower barriers for farm employers to participate in the visa program and bring many farmworkers out of the shadows and into longer-term, authorized employment. But to supply labor for the entire agricultural sector, the numbers just don’t add up. In 2017 there were 200,000 farmworkers on H-2A visas, and upwards of 1 million undocumented farmworkers nationally. The new H-2A overhaul would only allot 450,000 visas, a far cry from the labor needs of American agriculture.
Alternative Land Access: A Farmer-to-Farmer Discussion
by Pennsylvania Association of Sustainable Agriculture (PASA)

PASA and the National Young Farmer Coalition are inviting farmers located in, or searching for land in, western Pennsylvania for a listening session to discuss the farmland access and tenure challenges in that region.

For more details and registration, please click here.

Resources

Conference/Events

Oct 6, A one-day gathering to address these questions: Can the Northeast feed itself? If so, should it, At what environmental or other cost/benefits?, Bard College-Montgomery Place Campus 10 AM- 5:00 PM

Oct 13, Open House on the Farm, 10:00 AM - 3:00 PM Pine Bush, NY

Oct 30, Food and Farms Business Expo, 10 AM - 2 PM, New Windsor, NY

Farmer Grant Applications, Open until Nov, 27 by Northeast SARE

Farm Succession School in Warwick, RI (Dec, 11) and Bedford, NH (Dec, 12)

Reads/Webinars

Oct 11, Pricing Strategies: What’s the Right Price to maximize your profit? by Julia Shanks

Multispecies Grazing: A Primer on Diversity by ATTRA

Solarization and Tarping for Weed Management on Organic Vegetable Farms in the Northeast by University of Maine

Valuing the Ecosystem Service Benefits from Regenerative Agriculture Practices by Farmland LP

Workshops/Courses

Oct 11, Soil Health Clinic: Precise Field Sampling & Assessment Techniques, 5:00 PM - 6 PM Rochester, PA

Oct 13, Transition Truths: Taking Over and Established Farm Business, 1 PM-4:00 PM, Brookville, PA

Oct 17, Beef Quality Assurance Course, 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM, Berne, NY

Nov 1, Fall Round Up: Extending the Grazing Season for Livestock, 1:00 PM- 4:00 PM, Hudson, NY

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