

Taking On Our Workforce Challenges

Quick Facts

- The agriculture industry employed around 2.5 million people in 2022, with an additional 18+ million employed in agriculture-related jobs through the supply chain.
- The Department of Labor states that upwards of 50–70% of U.S. agriculture labor is unauthorized.
- While continuing to grow, the H-2A represents less than 10% of the hired agriculture labor force.
- According to the Partnership for a New American Economy, shortages in farm labor have resulted in higher food prices for consumers and as much as \$3 billion in missed GDP growth.

Background

For years, the fresh produce industry and our agriculture sector partners have made an overwhelming case for legislation to reform our broken immigration system and help build a legal and reliable workforce, especially now that the USDA expects the U.S. to import more food than it exports starting this year.

Last year, Congress made considerable progress toward addressing farm worker issues by

passing the Farm Workforce Modernization Act (H.R. 1603) and introducing the Affordable and Secure Food Act (S.5282). Even though these bills fell short, the 118th Congress will see Congress pursuing similar legislative solutions.

Labor challenges exist elsewhere in the supply chain, too, with the need for additional truck drivers, railroad workers, and more to avert another crisis, like the 2022 union strikes.

Workforce Reform in 2023

Key conversations have restarted in the 118th Congress to ensure the country has labor on the farm and in the supply chain while broad immigration reform efforts remain a priority for both parties. IFPA continues to act to keep this in focus through the following actions:

1. Ensure that any comprehensive legislation on the H-2A program includes opening the program up to year-round industries, allowing on-farm processing of fresh produce to utilize the program, and addressing the inequities in the current calculation of the Adverse Effect Wage Rate.
2. Identify and advocate for regulatory changes possible under the current Department of Labor H-2A program to provide greater flexibility.
3. Work with allies to reform and remove the cap on the H-2B visa program that the fresh produce industry is increasingly using.
4. Develop programs with government and stakeholder input to help enhance and address adequate labor supply to meet the needs of the industry throughout the supply chain, including capacity building for the transportation sector, mentorships and collaborations highlighting the fresh produce and floral industry, and securing resources for curriculum development to encourage new entries to the fresh produce and floral industry supply chain.