

Dear Congressman/Senator,

The undersigned Texas agricultural organizations write to you today to express our strong support of the "*Agricultural Guestworker Act*" (AG Act), authored by U.S. House Judiciary Committee Chairman Bob Goodlatte. We ask that you support and act promptly to include this legislation in any immigration package or any other legislative vehicle that comes before Congress.

Agriculture is at a crisis point and faces a critical farm labor shortage. Labor is the third-highest expense for agricultural producers, accounting for 17 percent of production costs for the sector and up to 40 to 50 percent in labor-intensive subsectors such as fruit, vegetables, and horticulture.

Domestic workers are largely unwilling to engage in physically demanding jobs. Current guest worker programs, such as H-2A, are extremely expensive and plagued with burdensome mandates. In addition, the H-2A program has never been open for key segments of agriculture like dairy, livestock, poultry, and timber.

Instability in the agricultural workforce places domestic food production at risk. Increasing immigration enforcement without also reforming our worker visa program could cost America \$60 billion in agricultural production. This situation makes U.S. agriculture less competitive with foreign farmers and less reliable for the American consumer. Securing a reliable and competent workforce is essential to agriculture, the economy, and our national food security.

The AG Act helps us meet these important goals and offers vast improvements over the existing H-2A program. This legislation creates a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) administered H-2C program that is available to seasonal and year-round agricultural employers such as dairies, raw food processors, timber, aquaculture, and others.

To create needed certainty for producers, the AG Act allows experienced agricultural workers to join and participate in the H-2C program. Farm workers who are currently ineligible can get pre-certified to join the H-2C program. After leaving the U.S. for a period of time, they can return to the U.S. and begin working legally.

The AG Act does not provide a pathway to citizenship – it simply allows individuals to work temporarily in the U.S. if they are legally participating in the H-2C program. The legislation ensures we are able to receive an adequate amount of workers when they are needed.

Since all agricultural jobs do not require the same level of skill and experience, the AG Act gives employers the ability to invest in training workers for specialized or hard-to-fill jobs by allowing workers an initial stay of 36 months. Subsequent visas for year-round agricultural jobs and all other H-2C visas will afford a work period of 24 months.

Further, the AG Act also ensures effective enforcement. Employers must report any H-2C workers who abandon their jobs within 72 hours. H-2C workers who do not return home as required are barred from reentry to the U.S. It also gives agricultural employers two years to adjust their workers and operations to the H-2C program before mandatory E-Verify takes effect.

In 1910, 76 percent of Texans lived in rural counties – today only 15 percent do. Other states share these same statistics, proving how quickly our urban population is growing. In order to give America’s agricultural producers the labor needed to run successful operations to feed and clothe a rapidly growing population, Congress must pass the AG Act.

Texas agriculture has waited over 20 years for meaningful reforms to our broken guest worker program. We must not let this opportunity pass us by.

We appreciate Chairman Bob Goodlatte for his steadfast leadership on this important issue. We respectfully ask that you support the Agricultural Guestworker Act and urge swift passage for America’s hardworking agricultural producers.

Sincerely,

Texas Farm Bureau
Southwest Council of Agribusiness
AgTexas Farm Credit Services
Corn Producers Association of Texas
Earthmoving Contractors Association of Texas
Independent Cattlemen's Association of Texas
Panhandle Peanut Growers Association
Plains Cotton Growers, Inc.
Plains Cotton Cooperative Association
Rolling Plains Cotton Growers, Inc.
Select Milk Producers, Inc.
Southern Rolling Plains Cotton Growers Association
South Texans’ Property Rights Association
South Texas Cotton & Grain Association
Texas Allied Poultry Association
Texas Agricultural Cooperative Council
Texas Agricultural Irrigation Association
Texas Association of Dairymen
Texas Broiler Council
Texas Cattle Feeders Association
Texas Cotton Producers, Inc.
Texas Cotton Ginners’ Association
Texas Egg Council
Texas Forestry Association
Texas Grain and Feed Association
Texas Grain Sorghum Association

Texas H.O.R.S.E
Texas Independent Ginners' Association
Texas International Produce Association
Texas Nursery and Landscape Association
Texas Pork Producers Association
Texas Poultry Federation
Texas Poultry Improvement Association
Texas Quarter Horse Association
Texas Rice Producers Legislative Group
Texas Seed Trade Association
Texas Sheep and Goat Raisers Association
Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association
Texas Soybean Association
Texas Turkey Federation
Texas Vegetable Association
Texas Wheat Producers Association
Texas Wine and Grape Growers Association
Vocational Agriculture Teachers Association of Texas
Western Peanut Growers Association
Colorado Corn Growers Association
Dairy Farmers of America
Louisiana Nursery and Landscape Association
U.S. Rice Producers Association