

Taking On Our Workforce Challenges

Quick Facts

- The average farmer is unable to hire more than 20% of their necessary labor forcing them to plant less or leave crops to rot.
- According to the Department of Labor, upwards of 50–70% of domestic agriculture labor is unauthorized.
- Participation in the H-2A Visa Program for agricultural workers has increased by more than 300% in the last 17 years.
- Labor costs for fruit and vegetable growers averaged 39% and 29% respectively, with the average cost for other forms of agriculture at about 10%.

Background

Our agricultural workforce crisis has reached a critical point, with labor shortages and costs to farmers far exceeding the value of their crops. Despite warning signs for years, Congress has failed to pass a single piece of legislation to modernize the H-2A program which is quickly becoming the only source of reliable labor for farmers in the United States.

While IFPA remains committed to the long-term reforms for which we have long advocated – addressing the current workforce and ensuring access to a future flow of workers – the urgency our growers face has required us to pivot, and seek immediate relief now, and reform later. IFPA remains eager to engage in any effort for comprehensive agricultural labor reform, but we will not ignore opportunities for small progress.

Workforce Reform in 2024

Any legislation to reform the H-2A program should include:

- Addressing the inequities in the current calculation of the Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AWER) and bringing certainty to producers who face uncapped increases.
- Opening the program up to year-round industries.
- Allowing on-farm produce processing to utilize the program.
- Push for regulatory changes to the Department of Labor's H-2A program to better serve producers' needs including repealing regulations that threaten our industry.
- Work with allies to reform and remove the cap on the H-2B visa program to meet the fresh produce industry's needs.
- Develop programs with stakeholder input that enhance and address building a

labor supply to meet the needs of industries 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.

