

AGRICULTURAL WORKER BILL INTRODUCED IN CONGRESS.

Washington D.C. - Tomorrow, Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and Congressmen Adam Putnam (R-FL) and Howard Berman (D-CA) will introduce, in the Senate and House, the Agricultural Job Opportunities, Benefits, and Security (AgJOBS) Act. AgJOBS is a bipartisan, compromise bill that is the result of years of negotiations among farmworkers, growers, and Members of Congress. The legislation has two parts: 1) an earned legalization program for unauthorized farmworkers who meet certain eligibility requirements; and 2) a revision of the H-2A temporary foreign agricultural worker program. Numerous organizations from across the political spectrum believe that the bill is necessary to create a stable agricultural workforce, improve the lives of farmworkers, and give employers access to the workers they need.

AgJOBS also serves as a blueprint for comprehensive immigration reform. AgJOBS demonstrates a successful model for compromise where workers and employers have come together to resolve their differences. The dysfunctional U.S. immigration system is currently standing in the way of addressing deeper structural problems that impact U.S. workers and U.S. competitiveness in a globalized market. The Immigration Policy Center has produced a fact sheet about the current challenges found at the intersection of immigration policy and agriculture, and why addressing these issues is critical to the nation's economy.

The Most Current Data Shows:

- **Farmwork is critical to the U.S.'s food security.** According to agricultural labor economist James Holt, less than 2% of the U.S. workforce is engaged in farm work. However, more than 550,000 U.S. farmers hire workers to fill more than 3 million agricultural jobs each year. Because many of these agricultural jobs are seasonal, the 3 million jobs are filled by 2.5 million workers.
- **Most farmworkers are not authorized to work legally in the U.S.** According to the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), the percentage of agricultural workers who reported that they were unauthorized has increased dramatically in the last two decades, rising from 7% in Fiscal Year (FY) 1989, to 16% in FY 1990-91, to 28% in FY 1992-93. In the most recently published NAWS survey from FY 2001-02, 53% of all seasonal agricultural workers admitted they were not authorized to work in the U.S. However, many experts suggest that the number may actually be closer to 75%.
- **U.S. growers want a stable, legal workforce.** The vast majority of U.S. employers are law-abiding and attempt to hire legal workers. However, even "good" employers can get caught up in immigration-enforcement actions. Labor disruptions due to worksite raids, immigration audits and investigations, Social Security Administration (SSA) "No-Match" letters, and other immigration-enforcement activities can result in severe financial problems for growers: crops rot in the fields, jobs further down the production line are lost, growers cannot make payments on loans, and farms go out of business.
- **Farmworkers suffer poor working conditions.** As in other sectors of the economy, the presence of many unauthorized workers exacerbates the problems of poor wages and working conditions and results in weak bargaining power for all workers. Undocumented workers live under the constant threat of deportation and are therefore less likely to lodge

complaints or join labor unions, resulting in poorer wages and conditions for all workers, including U.S. citizens.