



March 17, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy,

The National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) supports H.R. 1603, the Farm Workforce Modernization Act (FWMA). The FWMA is a crucial step forward towards solving agriculture's need for labor.

NASDA represents the Commissioners, Secretaries, and Directors of the state departments of agriculture in all 50 states and 4 U.S. territories. NASDA members represent all agriculture in their states and finding practical solutions for the agriculture labor shortage is a top priority for NASDA members. A stable workforce is needed to ensure consumers have access to an abundant, safe, and affordable food supply.

This legislation will successfully increase access to farm labor across the country. By 2026, nearly 25 percent of the U.S. workforce will be 55 and older¹. The agricultural and food sectors hold more than 21 million full and part-time jobs², and that number continues to rise annually. This means that in less than nine years, more than 5.35 million jobs will be available in the agriculture and food sectors. Foreign-born workers are an essential part of the U.S. agriculture workforce and an estimated half of U.S. farm workers are currently foreign born.³ For years, the agriculture industry has struggled to access sufficient labor in sectors ranging from produce to animal handling. These factors are why the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture urges Congress to pass the FWMA.

Agriculture labor reform is crucial for ensuring that U.S. farmers and ranchers have a reliable and skilled workforce. This bill will, for the first time, make year-round visas available. This is crucial for the dairy industry and other industries that rely on temporary labor. Further, NASDA supports

¹ <https://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2017/article/older-workers.htm>

² <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/ag-and-food-statistics-charting-the-essentials/ag-and-food-sectors-and-the-economy/>

³ https://www.fb.org/files/AFBF_LaborStudy_Feb2014.pdf

the bill maintaining the H-2A program while also creating a new, certified agricultural worker status. This status and its renewable visas will increase certainty for farmers, ranchers and the farm workers who we rely upon for the safe harvesting and handling of crops and livestock.

NASDA acknowledges that a multi-faceted effort is needed to fix the challenges with agriculture labor, so any progress made on this front is a step in the right direction. NASDA asks the members of the U.S. House of Representatives to advance this critical bill towards solving agriculture's need for labor, by voting in support of H.R. 1603, the Farm Workforce Modernization Act.

Please reach out to Rebecca Barnett, Public Policy Manager (Rebecca.Barnett@nasda.org) with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara P. Glenn".

Barbara P. Glenn, Ph.D.
Chief Executive Officer

cc: U.S. House of Representatives