



Issues Brief

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"Connecting Cows, Cooperatives, Capitol Hill, and Consumers"

U.S. Dairy Producers' Need for Immigration Reform

The Agricultural Job Opportunity, Benefits, and Security Act, also known as AgJobs, was reintroduced in the Senate (S. 1038) by Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and House of Representatives (HR 2414) Rep. Howard Berman (D- 28th CA) on May 14.

Now, more than ever, dairy producers urgently need Congress to act on agricultural immigration reform. A large percentage of the hired workers on dairy farms are immigrants. This is true for both large and small dairy farmers across this country. It is up to the 111th Congress to alleviate the pending labor crisis in agriculture by passing AgJOBS now!

NMPF strongly supports the type of broad immigration reform for the agriculture sector that AgJobs contains and a visa program for the dairy industry. AgJobs would address three critical areas of reform:

- Workable employer enforcement provisions
- A transition to legal status for the many undocumented immigrants currently working in agriculture in the U.S.
- Provisions for future temporary worker programs to fill jobs where there are insufficient U.S. agricultural workers.

Dairy farmers share the concerns of all Americans about securing our borders & protecting this country and they are not willing to sacrifice its security. However, failing to provide for orderly flows of greatly needed workers is creating enormous economic consequences for our industry and do very little to enhance our border protection.

Also, Rep. McHugh introduced the Dairy and Sheep H-2A Visa Enhancement Act - HR 1660. The bill would give dairy workers access to the H-2A program. Currently the dairy industry does not qualify for this program due to the constant nature of the work, thus leaving the dairy industry without a legal option to hire workers. This H-2A bill would allow workers to stay for three years given the year-round nature of the work. Currently, this provision only applies to sheep workers. The dairy industry is seeking a similar provision.

This emergency must be addressed right now, with support from both Democrats and Republicans. Congress must enact a permanent and workable solution for the agriculture industry. Without this, we'll see a food crisis here in America as farms fail and food production continues to move offshore to where the labor is.

We urge member of Congress to join as cosponsors of S. 1038, HR 2414 and HR 1660 to once and for all address the endemic labor shortage in the dairy farming sector and allow for dairy producers to work within the agricultural visa system.