



News Release

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

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NMPF Tells Senate Committee That Immigration Policy Needs Fixing

Dairy Group Pushes for Guest Worker Program, Opposes Enforcement-Only Approach

ARLINGTON, VA – In written testimony provided today to the Senate Judiciary Committee, the National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF) said that current labor and immigration policies put the U.S. dairy farm sector at a disadvantage, and that a change in laws is necessary in order to address the realities of dairy production in America.

In [testimony presented to the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration](#), which held a hearing Tuesday on the agricultural labor crisis, NMPF wrote that there remains a persistent shortage of native-born workers interested in employment on dairy farms, which is why farmers cannot find enough American workers to milk cows and perform other critical job functions on dairies.

"Even in this time of high unemployment, our dairy farmers universally report an inability to find enough American workers...even if they offer better pay than other jobs," said Jerry Kozak, President and CEO of NMPF. "Sufficient numbers of local workers are simply not available or not interested in working on dairy farms."

The challenge of hiring workers in 2011 is no different than in 2008, when [NMPF conducted a survey](#) to quantify the workforce hiring practices of dairy farms. That survey found that U.S. dairies employed 138,000 full-time equivalent workers, of which an estimated 57,000, or 41%, were foreigners.

Some other sectors in agriculture facing the same problem may be able to use the H-2A visa program to hire seasonal immigrant workers despite the significant flaws in the program, but the dairy sector cannot, a situation that is "fundamentally unfair. America's dairy farmers need and deserve to have the access to legal foreign workers as other sectors of the agricultural industry," Kozak said.

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Most current proposals to provide agriculture with a labor fix are designed to address the seasonal hiring needs of other portions of agriculture, but not the labor needs of dairy farmers every day of the year, NMPF's position is that the domestic dairy sector needs a year-round guest worker program.

Among other key criteria, such a program must feature no seasonality requirement, as does the H-2A program currently, along with most agricultural labor proposals in Congress; allow immigrants to work for at least three years; and make the process of applying for work simpler and quicker, NMPF said.

NMPF's testimony also highlighted concerns the organization has with an enforcement-only approach to immigration policy, such as shifting to the mandatory use of the E-Verify database system for verifying the immigration status of prospective workers.

"If Congress is going to enact a nationwide E-Verify requirement, then it also needs to provide agriculture with a workable guestworker program to meet our future needs and a means to allow those who are currently working in undocumented status to be eligible for that guestworker program."

"A failure to do so risks severely damaging the economic vitality of the nation's entire agriculture sector," NMPF wrote.

The National Milk Producers Federation, based in Arlington, VA, develops and carries out policies that advance the well being of dairy producers and the cooperatives they own. The members of NMPF's 31 cooperatives produce the majority of the U.S. milk supply, making NMPF the voice of more than 40,000 dairy producers on Capitol Hill and with government agencies. For more on NMPF's activities, visit our website at www.nmpf.org.