

# AgJobs

Justice for farm workers and stable labor supply for growers

*It is the farmer who does the work who ought to have the first share of the crops. 2Tim 2:6*

## Information:

Farms rely on immigrant labor to help plant, tend, and harvest the fruits and vegetables that are grown in the US. These are low-paying low skill jobs that historically US citizens have been hesitant to take. To help meet the needs of farmers, the US government has a temporary worker program known as the H-2A temporary foreign agricultural worker program. However, demand far outweighs the availability of these visas. There are three million agricultural jobs that are available each year.<sup>1</sup> Yet in 2007 the Department of State issued 50,791 H-2A visas.<sup>2</sup> The very limited number of visas available for immigrants and farms means that increasingly many, some say up to 70%, farm workers are undocumented. By the late 1990s 40-50% of farm laborers were undocumented, this was up from 10% in 1990.<sup>3</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Immigration Policy Center, <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/images/File/factcheck/Farmworkers%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Homeland Security, [http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/releases/pr\\_1202308216365.shtm](http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/releases/pr_1202308216365.shtm).

<sup>3</sup> *Work in America: M-Z*. Carl E. Van Horn and Herbert Schaffaer.

AgJOBS is a bill that has broad bi-partisan support and is supported by growers, workers, and advocates. This legislation was re-introduced in May 2009 in both the House and Senate. If passed AgJOBS would qualify undocumented farm workers and recent H-2A temporary workers who wish to permanently reside in the US access to a two step process.

*Step One* – Apply for a “Blue Card” Temporary resident status.

*Step Two* – Earn legal permanent resident status. Applicants must work a qualified number of days in US agriculture, pay a fine and application fee.

If the worker falls out of compliance on any or all requirements, they would lose their blue card and be required to leave the country.

AgJOBS would also reform the H-2A program in ways that would offer protection to workers employed by growers under this program.

For more information visit, [http://www.farmworkerjustice.org/Immigration\\_Labor/AgJOBS.htm](http://www.farmworkerjustice.org/Immigration_Labor/AgJOBS.htm).

## Insight:

Undocumented farm workers are kept in the shadows of society. They are not eligible for unemployment benefits, social security disability, or other benefits to which they contribute through payroll deductions. Many states deny worker's compensation to undocumented workers and seasonal or migrant workers with visas. This means few workers will seek medical attention for on the job accidents or follow orders to not work in order to fully recover. Undocumented workers are hesitant to complain about unsafe working conditions. This often puts them at increased

physical risk in a field where they are regularly exposed to chemicals and where often operate heavy machinery.

**Invitation to Act:**

Contact your elected officials and encourage them to co-sponsor and support AgJOBS (S1038 and HR2414). Write a letter or call congressional offices to voice your support for farm workers so that they may have a legal pathway to work in order to protect their health and safety as well as continue to provide US growers a stable source of labor.

**Inquire:**

In this time where farm workers are living in the shadows but the hope of dawn is present, pray that those who grow our food and harvest the crops will be able to have the "first share." They deserve share of the American Dream and to participate fully in the US culture that values their contributions. Join in prayer:

*Creator God who made Adam and Eve to till the soil and enjoy the fruits of your land, we ask your protection for the farm workers who today grow the food that feeds nations of your people. It is the farmer that deserves the first crop yet we eat heartily the fruits of the vine grown by another with little thought for the burden they carry. God help us gain justice for the farm workers so that they may live with their families in peace and safety, no longer in fear for their health or immigration status. It is in the name of Jesus,, your migrant itinerate preacher, that we pray. Amen.*

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