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**STATEMENT OF FARMWORKER JUSTICE ON THE INTRODUCTION OF THE AGRICULTURAL
WORKER PROGRAM ACT OF 2017**

Bill would stabilize farm labor force, provide protections for farmworkers

WASHINGTON, DC- Farmworker Justice welcomes the introduction of the Agricultural Worker Program Act of 2017 and supports its enactment. We thank Senator Feinstein for her leadership in support of reasonable, workable and fair immigration reform.

This bill provides progress toward comprehensive immigration reform while addressing the unique and urgent needs of agricultural and rural communities. Americans depend on the farm labor force for the production of abundant, safe, healthy, affordable food. Yet, the status quo for farmworkers and agricultural employers is untenable. Highly publicized immigration enforcement and the terror it creates are threatening many farmworker families and our agricultural system. The ability to legalize immigration status is key to enabling farmworkers to live and work without fear and seek improvements to their working and living conditions.

“With a majority of agricultural workers in the U.S. lacking immigration status, and the supply of farm labor constantly threatened by immigration enforcement, Congress must reform our broken immigration system. This bill would help ensure a stable, legal workforce in agriculture, which is good for farmworkers, employers, consumers and the national interest,” said Bruce Goldstein, President of Farmworker Justice.

The bill would establish an earned legalization program under which certain farmworkers who meet agricultural work requirements, national security clearance requirements, and other obligations are given temporary permission to work in agriculture for three to five years and the opportunity to earn immigration status with a path to citizenship.

The bill would keep the H-2A agricultural guestworker program intact; needed reforms could be addressed in future comprehensive immigration reform legislation. The H-2A program, which allows an unlimited number of work visas each year, has modest but important protections against abuse of U.S. and foreign workers that should be more effectively enforced. The bill would minimize the need for use of the H-2A program by providing a meaningful, long-term solution for agricultural employers through the earned legalization program.

“The Agricultural Worker Program Act of 2017 is a fair and sensible way to reform our immigration system while also providing a stable workforce for U.S. farmers and ranchers, contributing to the sustainability of U.S. agriculture for generations to come,” said Bruce Goldstein, president of Farmworker Justice. “Congress should embrace Senator Feinstein’s Agricultural Worker Program Act of 2017.”

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Farmworker Justice is a national advocacy organization for migrant and seasonal farmworkers with thirty years of experience on immigration and labor policy.