

Farmworker Justice Statement on Trump's Suspension of Immigration

Agricultural Guestworkers Are Exception and Are Subjected to Dangerous Risks of Exposure to COVID-19 Without Health Care

April 21, 2020

Contact: bgoldstein@farmworkerjustice.org

President Trump's announcement of a planned executive order to suspend all immigration reportedly will NOT terminate visa processing and hiring of agricultural guestworkers under the H-2A temporary foreign agricultural worker program. In fact, the Trump Administration has issued a series of orders granting agricultural employers additional flexibility in bringing in and employing H-2A visa workers. About 250,000 guestworkers were approved in FY 2019, about 10% of the farm labor force of roughly 2.5 million.

[Farmworker Justice and partners on March 25 submitted a detailed letter](#) to the Administration identifying the serious risks of COVID-19 exposure, illness and economic harm to both U.S. farmworkers and foreign guestworkers hired by employers using the H-2A program. The letter demanded of protections to prevent and respond to COVID-19 for farmworkers under the H-2A program.

The Administration has not taken any action to protect farmworkers hired by H-2A program employers. The Administration has not responded to this letter which was signed on to by three dozen groups.

"Agricultural employers arrange transportation from Mexico and other countries for agricultural guestworkers, who usually travel on crowded buses, are placed in crowded housing, work in groups in the field, lack health insurance, and are dependent on that one employer to be able to work and to remain in the United States," said Bruce Goldstein, President of Farmworker Justice. Farmworker Justice is a Washington, D.C.-based advocacy organization for farmworkers which has been working on agricultural guestworker and immigration issues since its founding in 1981.

"This is a public health and occupational safety nightmare. These conditions endanger the health and lives of tens of thousands of agricultural guestworkers and U.S. farmworkers employed at H-2A farms, but this Administration has done nothing to require employers to protect farmworkers against the pandemic. The Trump Administration plans to shut down most immigration while it enables agricultural employers to bring in guestworkers subjected to dangerous risk of COVID-19 without health insurance for testing and treatment," added Goldstein.

"The termination of immigration would be an outrageous denial of this country's history as a nation of immigrants. **The planned exception for agricultural guestworker hiring without**

protections against COVID-19 for those workers is a cruel policy that will almost certainly lead to many illnesses and deaths," said Goldstein.

The protections requested in the coalition letter of March 25 should be adopted immediately. More information on [farmworkers and COVID-19](#) is on our website. The Farmworker Justice website also has extensive information about the [H-2A guestworker program](#) and immigration policy.

###