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New Farmworker Justice Report Quantifies Wage Loss to Tens of Thousands of Farmworkers in Proposal in Congress and the Administration

Farmworker Justice, the Washington, D.C.-based national advocacy organization for farmworkers – the people who labor in the nation’s farms and ranches – and their family members, has issued a new report regarding proposals to lower farmworkers’ wages. *Congress and the Administration Must Not Cut Farmworkers’ Wages in the H-2A Guestworker Program.*

There is a proposal in a bill in the House of Representatives to lower wage rates for tens of thousands of farmworkers and that proposal is also under consideration by the Trump Administration in a long-planned change to regulations.

The proposed wage cut would occur under the H-2A temporary foreign agricultural worker program. In fiscal year 2019, the Department of Labor approved 257,000 H-2A jobs, a number that has been increasing in recent years.

Employers obtaining approval to hire agricultural guestworkers on H-2A visas must offer certain minimum wages to both the foreign citizens and the U.S.-based farmworkers who apply for and obtain jobs at these employers. The current formula for the main wage rate is a survey of the labor market. Rather than use a measure of the prevailing wages to prevent depression in farmworkers’ wages, the proposal would allow the hiring of guestworkers and US workers at an arbitrarily lower wage rate.

The result would be massive wage cuts. For example, in Florida the 2020 wage would be \$3.15 per hour lower than it is now. If the proposal had been in force in 2019, the report – using U.S. Department of Labor Data – finds that the wage cut would have been \$2.78 per hour and farmworkers at Florida H-2A employers on average would have been paid \$101 less per week.

“Massive wage cuts for essential workers cultivating and harvesting our fruits and vegetables would be unconscionable,” said Bruce Goldstein, President of Farmworker Justice, a co-author of the report. “The H-2A agricultural guestworker program has modest protections against depressing the wage rates of U.S. farmworkers and against the exploitation of foreign citizens employed as agricultural guestworkers. This report quantifies the tremendous economic harm that a proposed wage cut inflict on farmworkers, who already are among the lowest-paid workers in the nation.”

Farmworker Justice is a national advocacy, litigation and education organization based in Washington, D.C. Its mission is to empower farmworkers to improve their wages and working conditions, immigration status, occupational safety, health and access to the justice system. Throughout its 39-year history it has engaged in substantial policy analysis, advocacy, litigation and support to farmworker organizations regarding immigration policy and guestworker programs. Information about the H-2A program is available on its website resource center at <https://www.farmworkerjustice.org/resources/h-2a> Information about recent legislative proposals in Congress on farmworker immigration and the h-2A program is available at <https://www.farmworkerjustice.org/resources/116th-congress-2019-2020>

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