



HR1773: Path to Nowhere- Creates a Permanent Farmworker Underclass Forever

Rep. Goodlatte's "Agricultural Guestworker Act" fails to address our broken immigration system. HR 1773 provides no path to citizenship for America's estimated one million undocumented farmworkers. Instead, the bill would create a massive new agricultural guestworker program that would place farmworkers in permanent second-class status forever and would tear families apart. The bill would essentially take the current de facto system that treats farmworkers as second class citizens and legalize it, adding the government's stamp of approval. Instead of modeling our immigration system after countries with notorious guestworker systems like Saudi Arabia's, we should value the workers who contribute to our society and offer them a path to citizenship.

Rep. Goodlatte would expect the roughly 1,000,000 undocumented farmworkers to essentially self-deport within the first 2 years after enactment. They would only be allowed to come back as guestworkers and only if they have an offer of employment. Spouses and children would receive no status. These workers could remain in temporary nonimmigrant status indefinitely (with mandated returns every several years) with practically no legal protections as long as they continued to work in agriculture. At the same time, growers could access another 500,000 new guestworkers at wages significantly below current farmworker wages. In addition to their exclusion from many of the labor laws that protect most other American workers, guestworkers would also be excluded from the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act, one of the primary protections for farmworkers. As guestworkers, the workers' status would be dependent on their ability to obtain agricultural work and maintain that employment. In a program with practically no protections, farmworkers would be vulnerable and exploitable. This perpetuates the current system, in which the largely undocumented farm labor force fears speaking up for their rights due to the fear of losing of their jobs and potential immigration enforcement. These workers would simply be trading one form of second-class status for another and would have no chance to become a member of the society they help to feed.

Farmworkers contribute to our economy and society and should be treated as people, not commodities. Under Goodlatte's plan, farmworkers could work legally in the U.S. for their whole lives with no opportunity to become citizens. This is contrary to American values of freedom, equality and democracy. All Americans deserve an opportunity to fully participate in our political process.

HR 1773 is bad for workers and bad for families. Goodlatte's proposal will deliberately break families apart. The bill is designed for family members to self-deport, or be deported by the government, with the result that farmworkers live apart from their loved ones indefinitely. For those farmworkers with citizen children or spouses, the farmworker has no opportunity to join them and to create a stable home. Instead, seasonal guestworkers would be required to return home 3 months out of every other year and workers in year-round jobs to return home for 3 months every 3 years. Mixed status families would face the choice of taking their citizen

children out of the country or separating their families. In reality, it's likely that most undocumented families would remain out of status, subject to fear of immigration enforcement that is only likely to increase in the future.

Our immigration system has long been focused on reuniting families. U.S. families are the core unit of our nation, and immigrant families come to the U.S. in search of opportunity. The family is crucial to the socioeconomic success of immigrant families and our communities. Strong families build a strong middle class and help grow our economy, making the U.S. more competitive in the global market. Together, families work hard, pay taxes, buy homes, and start job-creating businesses. Any bill that would promote family separation is contrary to our values as a Nation and should be rejected.

For too long agribusiness has relied on a cheap exploitable labor force with little to no political power. Immigration reform is an opportunity to create a new system affords farmworkers an opportunity to assert their rights and improve their wages and working conditions. The men and women who give their bodies to harvest our food deserve better than this bill has to offer.

We are united as a nation by a deep respect for those who work hard for a living to make our nation stronger. Farmworkers work very hard and we depend on them for our Nation's food security. They should be treated with dignity and respect and afforded an opportunity to earn immigration status for themselves and their families that includes a path to citizenship.