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Farmworker Justice Condemns House Amendment to the DHS Appropriations Bill Expanding the H-2A Agricultural Guestworker Program to Year-Round Jobs

Washington, DC -The House Appropriations Committee today, in the spending bill for the Department of Homeland Security, inserted a fundamental, substantive policy change to the H-2A temporary foreign agricultural worker program. The amendment would expand the scope of the H-2A program to allow H-2A visas to be issued without regard to whether the jobs are temporary or seasonal. Rep. Newhouse (R-WA) led this effort.

Farmworker Justice strongly opposes this proposed change and the method by which it was adopted. Bruce Goldstein, President of Farmworker Justice, said: “Expanding the H-2A program to year-round jobs would contravene the purpose of the program and further distort the agricultural labor market. The H-2A program is premised on the alleged difficulty finding U.S. workers for seasonal farm jobs because they yield low annual incomes. That same logic does not apply to year-round employment. Agricultural employers with year-round jobs should do what any other employer must do to attract and retain workers: improve wages and working conditions.” In addition, such a major change to the legislation should not occur through a rider to an appropriations bill.

This amendment does nothing to fix the H-2A program. The H-2A program is rife with abuses. Unscrupulous employers take advantage of and exploit vulnerable guestworkers, resulting in the displacement of U.S. workers and undermining of U.S. workers’ wages and labor standards. Moreover, expanding the H-2A program to year-round jobs does nothing to address the roughly one million current farmworkers who are undocumented and face the threat of detection and deportation. It makes little sense to allow employers to hire H-2A guestworkers to displace their current undocumented and documented farmworkers.

Farmworker Justice calls on Congress to prevent this amendment from passing and to instead pass legislation granting immigration status and a path to citizenship for undocumented workers and their family members. The Agricultural Worker Program Act, S.1034/HR2690 would do so, providing a workable solution that will meet the needs of workers, agricultural employers, and our food system.

Farmworker Justice is a national advocacy group for farmworkers. www.farmworkerjustice.org
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