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Farmworker Justice Statement on House Immigration Subcommittee Hearing addressing Agricultural Guestworkers: Congress Should Pass Immigration Reform that Respects the Contributions of Farmworkers to Our Economy and Society

Washington, DC – Regarding today’s hearing of the House Judiciary immigration subcommittee titled “Agricultural Guestworkers: Meeting the Growing Needs of American Farmers,” Farmworker Justice President Bruce Goldstein stated: “The situation facing our nation’s farmworkers and food system is dire. At least half and likely more of our nation’s farmworkers are undocumented. These farmworkers are living and working in fear due to the Administration’s criminalization of immigrants and the increasing pace of indiscriminate arrests and deportations of immigrants. The most important step to take now is to pass legislation that gives current undocumented farmworkers and their family members the opportunity to obtain immigration status and eventual U.S. citizenship.”

This hearing is an opportunity to move forward a positive and workable solution in Congress that will meet the needs of workers, agricultural employers, and our food system. The Agricultural Worker Program Act, which was introduced in Congress by Rep. Gutierrez and Sen. Feinstein, and cosponsors, would recognize the hard work and contributions of experienced farmworkers by providing them an opportunity to earn lawful permanent residency through continued agricultural work. This bill would benefit America by ensuring farmworkers the ability to continue working and contributing to the communities in which they have long been members; providing a stable workforce for employers; and helping to ensure a secure, safe and responsible food system for consumers.

The hearing is focused on agricultural “guestworkers.” We know from our own history and world-wide experiences that a guestworker system is not an appropriate solution to solve the current problems. We are already seeing unprecedented expansion in the H-2A program; there is no cap on the number of H-2A visas per year and many more employers are applying. We are deeply concerned about this expansion: both for our domestic labor force which may be losing access to needed farm jobs, and for H-2A workers, who are vulnerable to exploitation due to their dependent status on their employer and other structural program flaws. America is a nation of immigrants, not guestworkers. We must respect the humanity of farmworkers and treat them as we would treat others who contribute to our nation’s success, offering them the opportunity to be permanent members of our society and the communities they help build.

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