



FARMWORKER JUSTICE

Statement on Vote to Approve Agricultural Worker Immigration Bill by House Judiciary Committee

Farmworker Justice appreciates the markup and the vote by the House Committee on the Judiciary on November 21 to support passage of the Farm Workforce Modernization Act of 2019, HR5038. We thank the Committee Chair, Rep. Nadler, for the markup of this important bill regarding our agriculture and food system.

Farmworker Justice is grateful to Rep. Lofgren, Chair of the Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship, and Rep. Newhouse, as well as additional colleagues, for the extensive efforts they made to engage with Farmworker Justice, the United Farm Workers, the UFW Foundation, major agricultural employer organizations and other stakeholders to arrive at a compromise that garnered widespread support. As the diverse viewpoints expressed during the markup demonstrated, achieving agreement required extraordinary effort and skill.

This legislation recognizes the important contributions of farmworkers to our nation's food and agriculture systems. An estimated 2.4 million people labor on our farms and ranches to provide us with fruits, vegetables, milk and other food. Roughly half of farmworkers lack authorized immigration status. Undocumented farmworkers and their family members live in fear of arrest, deportation and the breakup of their families. In these circumstances, many farmworkers are reluctant to challenge illegal or unfair treatment. At times, they cannot go to work due to the presence of immigration enforcement agents. The country's farms and our food system depend on immigrants, both documented and undocumented, and reform is long overdue.

The Farm Workforce Modernization Act bill provides a path to lawful permanent residency for undocumented farmworkers and their family members. Removing the threat of immigration enforcement would reduce the stress on farmworker families and the disruptions of farming businesses. Legal status would help farmworkers improve their wages and working conditions. These improvements would result in a more stable farm labor force and greater food safety and security. The earned legalization program's requirements are more rigorous and expensive than we would have preferred, but are acceptable to achieve a realistic compromise,

The bill also would revise the existing H-2A agricultural guestworker program to address farmworker and employer concerns with the program. The bill includes important new protections for farmworkers, as well as numerous changes to address agricultural employers' concerns. Compromise was necessary to achieve legislation that could become law and address serious harms imposed on farmworker families by our broken immigration system.

Farmworker Justice appreciates the Judiciary Committee's vote in favor of the Farm Workforce Modernization Act of 2019 because the bill, if passed, would enable hundreds of thousands of farmworker families to improve their living and working conditions and their participation in our economy and democracy.