



For Immediate Release

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Rep. Goodlatte's Agricultural Guestworker Act Would Create Exploitative Guestworker Program

Washington, D.C. - On October 24, 2017, the House Judiciary Committee is scheduled to mark-up Chairman Bob Goodlatte's (R-Va.) "Agricultural Guestworker Act." Rep. Goodlatte's bill was originally scheduled to be marked up earlier this month, but the hearing was postponed. Farmworker Justice strongly opposes this proposal.

Rep. Goodlatte's proposal would devastate America's current and future farmworkers. By stripping away labor protections that evolved over decades in response to abuses, the proposed H-2C visa program would subject hundreds of thousands of U.S. farmworkers to job losses and lower wages, and would allow exploitation of vulnerable guestworkers. Rep. Goodlatte's bill also fails provide a workable solution for undocumented farmworkers, who make up at least half of the current workforce and are vital to maintaining our food and agricultural systems. And not just farmworkers would be impacted -- the Agricultural Guestworker Act reaches beyond traditional farm jobs to include agriculture-related processing and manufacturing jobs, as well as forestry and aquaculture.

Farmworker Justice Director of Immigration and Labor Adrienne DerVartanian said: "Rep. Goodlatte's bill would create a massive new anti-worker, anti-immigrant guestworker program. This program would subject workers across agriculture and beyond—from the fields to the processing plants, from aquaculture to forestry—to low wages, poor working conditions, and exploitation. Instead of providing our nation's experienced undocumented workers with a path to immigration status and citizenship, the only option this bill provides is for undocumented workers to become subjugated contract laborers under the new H-2C program, a program that requires workers to regularly return to their country of origin and intentionally prohibits family members from joining workers."

Hundreds of thousands of U.S workers depend on these jobs for their livelihood and work hard to make sure America has a safe, abundant food supply. This bill only provides the likelihood of

displacement when workers are unwilling to accept the substandard wages and working conditions this bill provides. We are a nation of immigrants, not a nation of guestworkers deprived of economic freedom and political representation. Congress should reject the Goodlatte bill and other pending anti-worker, anti-immigrant proposals regarding agricultural workers. It is illogical to allow employers to hire more guestworkers without first addressing the need to legalize the hundreds of thousands of experienced farmworkers who are already contributing to our economy and society, many with U.S. citizen children and deep ties to their communities.

Our agricultural labor system deserves a real solution that provides a path to citizenship for farmworkers, as is offered in the Agricultural Worker Program Act introduced by Rep. Gutierrez (D-IL) and Sen. Feinstein (D-CA). The Agricultural Guestworker Act would create an extremely abusive new guestworker program that would transform the farm labor force into a system of non-immigrant guestworkers who hold temporary work permits and are subjected to low wages and poor working conditions, with inadequate recourse for the abuses that will inevitably result from the program's inherently flawed structure.