

**Farmworker Justice Statement on
Cabinet Announcement of H-2A Program “Modernization”**

This afternoon, Secretary of Agriculture Perdue, Secretary of Labor Acosta, Secretary of Homeland Security Nielsen, and Secretary of State Pompeo [issued a joint statement](#) announcing that their Departments are working in coordination to “streamline, simplify and improve” the H-2A temporary agricultural worker visa program. The announcement does not specify what changes may be made to the H-2A program, nor a timeline for any proposed changes.

Farmworker Justice is concerned that this announcement portends that the Administration will be engaging in rulemaking to eliminate or otherwise reduce the H-2A program’s limited but critically important protections. Based on the announcement’s one-sided focus of delivering “for American farmers” as well as the current Administration’s ties to agribusiness interests and focus on anti-immigrant, anti-worker and anti-regulatory actions, Farmworker Justice fears the upcoming changes to “simplify” or “streamline” the H-2A program could include changes that would reduce obligations for agricultural employers to effectively recruit U.S. workers, lower farmworkers’ wages and working conditions, and weaken government oversight of the program.

While agribusiness has engaged in an aggressive campaign to critique the H-2A program’s rules and requirements, these modest requirements were put into place based on lessons learned from past guestworker programs. The protections are intended to ensure that U.S. workers do not face displacement and that the wages and working conditions of U.S. workers aren’t adversely impacted by the ability of employers to bring in unlimited numbers of captive visa workers from abroad. In fact, the existing protections are inadequate and they need to be strengthened, not weakened. Just last week, the Department of Justice indicted several individuals for committing fraud and abuse under the H-2A program, and there have been various recent cases of violations of the program’s protections, including wage theft, inhumane housing conditions and discrimination against U.S. workers. The statement includes language regarding the need to reinforce “the program’s strong employment and wage protections for the American workforce.” We hope this is a true commitment and not a ploy to mollify the “America first” audience.

Today’s announcement includes no mention or recognition of the farmworkers who work every day to tend and harvest our nation’s abundant food supply. Farmworkers are human beings who deserve to be treated with dignity, not commodities to be imported cheaply or “streamlined” in the service of employers’ bottom lines. Moreover, the announcement fails to recognize the devastation that the Trump administration’s harsh immigration enforcement actions are having on farmworker families and communities. Immigration reform with a path to citizenship is urgently needed, but it must be fair, humane and respectful of farmworkers and their family members.