



**October 25, 2017**

## **Farmworker Justice Statement on the House Judiciary Committee Passage of the Agricultural Guestworker Act**

Farmworker Justice condemns the passage today, in the House Judiciary Committee, of an amended version of the “Agricultural Guestworker Act,” HR 4092, sponsored by Committee Chair Goodlatte (R-VA). This legislation would replace the current H-2A agricultural guestworker program with a devastating new H-2C program, expanding employer access to potentially millions of vulnerable new “guestworkers.” The program would reach not just traditional seasonal farm work, but also would include year round jobs in many occupations, such as meat and poultry packing and processing, forestry, aquaculture, and more.

Adrienne DerVartanian, the Director of Immigration and Labor Policy of Farmworker Justice said today, “This legislation is fundamentally anti-immigrant and anti-worker. It would make life monumentally worse for agricultural workers, including the hundreds of thousands of U.S. farmworkers and the roughly one million undocumented workers currently doing this work, as well as the untold number of guestworkers who could come to the U.S. to labor under this program.”

The impact of this bill’s exploitative conditions would have a profoundly adverse impact on US workers because it allows employers to provide substandard wages and working conditions. As the new program erases existing labor protections, including crucial wage requirements, U.S. workers will be displaced or earn lower wages.

The bill fails to provide a solution for the many undocumented farmworkers who labor daily to ensure America has a safe, secure and abundant food supply. The legislation denies current undocumented farmworkers the chance to earn immigration status or citizenship. Instead, undocumented workers would be required to self-deport and would be dependent on an employer to sponsor them for an H-2C visa. Instead of supporting families, this bill would tear families apart as the legislation specifically and intentionally separates families by prohibiting family visas. This is cruel and senseless—to the farmworkers who have worked here for years, to their families, and to the U.S. communities they have helped build and sustain.

It is not surprising that the discussion during the markup turned to sharecropping and indentured servitude given the significant negative impact this bill would have on the millions of guestworkers who could enter the U.S. under this program. These new H-2C guestworkers would likely face debt, extremely low wages, dangerous living and working

conditions, and extremely limited access to justice. Additionally, workers would be separated from their families and would have no path to citizenship, even if they worked in the U.S. for years.”

There is a sensible solution to address the impact of the broken immigration system on agriculture, the Agricultural Worker Program Act, introduced by Rep. Gutierrez (D-IL) and Sen. Feinstein (D-CA). The Agricultural Worker Program Act recognizes the value of farmworkers to the stability of our food system by providing a path to citizenship for qualified farmworkers and their families. The legislation would benefit not only farmworkers and agricultural employers, but also our national interest in a secure, safe food supply.

Farmworker Justice is deeply disappointed in the passage of this bill, but does appreciate the amendments offered by some Members that sought to improve wages and working conditions, ensure access to justice, provide housing, offer a path to immigration status and citizenship, and limit the scope and size of this program. While unsuccessful, these amendments and the debate thereon highlighted the devastating nature of the bill for all workers. Farmworker Justice will continue to fight to defeat this terrible legislation and to seek for justice for farmworkers, including an opportunity for immigration status and improved wages and working conditions.