



For Immediate Release

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Statement of Farmworker Justice on Executive Order on Rural America

Washington, DC- Today, President Trump issued an Executive Order addressing agricultural and rural prosperity. The Order calls for an interagency task force that will make recommendations to address the rural economy. Among the issues to be considered is ensuring that farmers have access to a “reliable workforce.” The Order follows a White House meeting with President Trump’s newly-confirmed Agriculture Secretary, Sonny Perdue, and growers from around the country.

“Unfortunately, Trump’s meeting and order fail to address in any meaningful way the challenges experienced by agricultural workers and their families who are so important to rural communities and the economy. Not one farmworker was included in today’s meeting. Moreover, the Order fails to recognize the devastation that the Trump administration’s harsh immigration enforcement actions are having on farmworker families and communities,” said Bruce Goldstein, President of Farmworker Justice, a national advocacy group for farmworkers.

Immigration reform is urgently needed, but it must be fair, humane and respectful of farmworkers and their family members. This is a nation of immigrants. Farmworkers and their family members deserve an opportunity for immigration status. Instead, the Executive Order, taken together with comments from yesterday’s press briefing, indicates that the Administration will likely propose limiting key worker protections and Department of Labor (DOL) oversight in the already abusive H-2A agricultural guestworker program.

Despite employer complaints about the H-2A program and the DOL, the program has almost tripled in size in recent years: from about 60,000 worker positions certified in FY 2006 to about 165,000 worker positions certified in FY 2016. There is no limit on the number of H-2A workers that can be brought to the U.S. Current approval rates and timeliness of certifications are at 98%.

Trump himself has a business interest in facilitating employer access to a cheaper H-2A program as the Trump Winery and vineyard in Virginia brings in H-2A workers. Moreover, a past Executive Order promised to reduce regulations by 75% for the benefit of businesses.



“We are very concerned that the EO will lead to more abuses of U.S. and foreign workers under a de-regulated H-2A agricultural guestworker program,” said Goldstein. The solution to our agriculture labor needs is comprehensive immigration reform that provides a path to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented immigrants in the US, including farmworkers and their families. If future farmworkers from abroad are needed, they and their family members must be afforded stronger protections and should have a meaningful opportunity to become immigrants and citizens. In addition, wages and working conditions should be improved to attract and retain farmworkers and enable farmworker families and communities to thrive.

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