



FARMWORKER JUSTICE

For Immediate Release

Bruce Goldstein, bgoldstein@farmworkerjustice.org 202-800-2521

Adrienne DerVartanian adervartanian@farmworkerjustice.org

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Farmworker Justice Statement on the Passage in the House of Representatives of the Farm Workforce Modernization Act, HR 5038

Farmworker Justice thanks the Members of the House of Representatives who voted in favor of the Farm Workforce Modernization Act of 2019, HR 5038, which passed the House today.

The Farm Workforce Modernization Act (FWMA) resulted from lengthy, complex negotiations led by Rep. Lofgren (D-CA), Chair of the Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship, and Rep. Newhouse (R-WA), a farmer and former Director of Washington State's Department of Agriculture, and additional colleagues. To help reach agreement, Members of Congress involved farmworker advocates, including the United Farm Workers and Farmworker Justice, as well as agricultural employer trade associations and other stakeholders.

“Achieving compromise on complex, polarizing labor-management and immigration issues was possible because of the wide recognition that farmworkers are essential to our nation's food and agriculture systems,” said Bruce Goldstein, President of Farmworker Justice. “Our nation’s immigration system is broken and results in great unfairness, as over one-half of the 2.4 million people who labor on our farms and ranches to feed us are undocumented immigrants. This bill, despite shortcomings that are inevitable in any compromise, is a responsible effort to fix our broken immigration system and enable many farmworkers and their families to gain a greater measure of justice.”

The large majority of the nation’s 2.4 million farmworkers are immigrants, and a majority lack authorized immigration status. Undocumented farmworkers and their family members live in fear of arrest, deportation and the breakup of their families. Many farmworkers are reluctant to challenge illegal or unfair treatment in their workplaces and their communities. At times, they cannot go to work or their children’s school functions due to the presence of immigration enforcement agents. “The country’s farms and our food system depend on immigrants, both documented and undocumented, and they deserve a greater measure of justice,” Goldstein added.

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 help farmworker families and farming businesses. “With legal status, farmworkers would be better able to improve their wages and working conditions and seek enforcement when their limited labor rights are violated,” said Goldstein. These improvements would result in a more stable farm labor force and greater food safety and security to the benefit of employers, workers, and consumers. The earned legalization program’s requirements are more rigorous, lengthy and expensive than we preferred, but are acceptable in the effort to reach a realistic, bipartisan compromise,

The bill also would revise the existing H-2A agricultural guestworker program to address farmworker and employer concerns with the program.

Farmworker advocates have pressed for reforms to reduce widespread abuses under this flawed program, while agricultural employers have lobbied heavily to remove most of its modest labor protections, claiming that the program is unduly expensive and bureaucratic. “The bill’s lengthy provisions on the H-2A guestworker program include important new protections for U.S. and foreign farmworkers, as well as changes to address agricultural employers’ demands that Farmworker Justice has historically opposed,” said Goldstein. 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 supports the Farm Workforce Modernization Act of 2019 because it would help hundreds of thousands of farmworkers and their family members improve their lives. Our [fact sheet on the bill is available on our website’s Resource Center](#) under Legislative Proposals/116th Congress.

Farmworker Justice, based in Washington, D.C., is a national advocacy organization for farmworkers with over thirty-five years of experience serving the farmworker community regarding immigration and labor policy. FJ’s website contains extensive information about farmworkers, immigration policy, labor conditions and the H-2A agricultural guestworker program. www.farmworkerjustice.org [@farmwrkrjustice](https://twitter.com/farmwrkrjustice)

Contact: Bruce Goldstein, Farmworker Justice, bgoldstein@farmworkerjustice.org
Adrienne DerVartanian, Farmworker Justice, 202-800-2522 adervartanian@farmworkerjustice.org
1126 16th St., NW, Suite LL-101
Washington, D.C. 20036

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