

## **AGJOBS: STABILIZING THE AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE** **BIPARTISAN, PRO-BUSINESS AND PRO-WORKER SOLUTIONS**

An estimated 75 percent of the workers who plant, pick and harvest the fruits and vegetables served on our dinner tables each day are in the country illegally. While America's knowledge-based economy grows, farm growers are having more and more difficulty in finding American workers willing to endure the heat, back-breaking labor and low wages associated with working in the fields. The shortage of legal farm workers in the U.S. has reached crisis proportions. Farms are closing. Growers are planting less or switching to other crops, and the production of fresh produce is moving abroad.

At the same time, immigration enforcement has tightened both at the federal and state level, making it even harder for immigrant farm workers to get to the fields. The result has been millions of dollars' worth of crops lost because of a lack of workers to harvest them.

### ***There is a better way to protect our nation's food security.***

The Agricultural Job Opportunities, Benefits and Security Act (AgJOBS) aims to relieve chronic farm labor shortages while protecting the rights of immigrant farm workers.

AgJOBS is the result of over a decade of carefully-negotiated agreements between business and labor. The legislation includes a path to earned citizenship for unauthorized farmworkers who meet specific requirements and who pay fines and back taxes. The bill also reforms the existing H-2A temporary agriculture worker visa program by making it easier for growers to hire more temporary immigrant workers; it also improves housing benefits and provides better legal protections for workers.

Failure to resolve our immigrant farmworker crisis will bring far-reaching economic damage. Consider this:

- For every agricultural worker job, up to three additional jobs are created in related industries.
- Eliminating immigrant workers from the dairy industry alone would reduce U.S. milk production by 29.5 billion pounds and the number of U.S. farms by 4,532. Retail milk prices would increase by an estimated 61%, according to the National Milk Producers Federation.
- Approximately 80% of Florida's 150,000 agricultural workers are undocumented immigrants. Their work provides up to 90% of the fresh domestic tomatoes that Americans eat between the months of December and May and are a part of a \$1.6 billion-a-year business.

The [\*New York Times\*](#) editorial board put it simply: AgJobs is "A model compromise, mixing pro-business pragmatism with a commitment to protecting workers—future Americans—who do some of the country's most vital yet difficult jobs."