



Statement for the Record

**House Judiciary Committee
Subcommittee on Immigration Policy and Enforcement**

**Hearing on, “The H-2A Visa Program:
Meeting the Growing Needs of American Agriculture?”**

April 13, 2011

The National Immigration Forum works to uphold America’s tradition as a nation of immigrants. The Forum advocates for the value of immigrants and immigration to the nation, building support for public policies that reunite families, recognize the importance of immigration to our economy and our communities, protect refugees, encourage newcomers to become new Americans and promote equal protection under the law.

We are submitting our views about the subject of this hearing on the H-2A Visa program and the labor needs of American Agriculture.

The first step in resolving American Agriculture’s need for a stable workforce must be to provide the 50 to 70 percent of that workforce that is now undocumented with some way to gain legal status and remain in the workforce without fear of deportation. Such a solution has been offered in the past several Congresses in the form of the Agricultural Job Opportunities, Benefits, and Security Act (AgJOBS). AgJOBS includes a program by which farmworkers can earn temporary legal status and, by continuing to work in agriculture and meeting other requirements, eventual permanent resident status. It is an important component of immigration reform that is desperately needed to fix our outdated immigration system.

AgJOBS tackles an increasingly serious problem faced by many of our agricultural producers: the threat of losing their most experienced employees to immigration enforcement. These hard-working, experienced, and otherwise law-abiding farm employees deserve a chance to work with proper legal status. They are, after all, the backbone of a system that feeds us all.

It would be in the best interest of the nation for Congress to enact the reforms embodied in AgJOBS. Failure to act will drive some of our food production to other countries, and as a result the U.S. will become more dependent on food that is imported.

AgJOBS represents a historic compromise between agricultural producers and agricultural workers and their advocates. We believe that if workers and growers have been able to work out a common position, Congress should be able to follow their lead and enact this important piece of broader comprehensive immigration reform.