

April 02, 2026

The Honorable Marco Rubio

Secretary of State

U.S. Department of State

2201 C Street NW

Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio

Producing America's food supply is an expensive demanding and time-sensitive enterprise. For labor-intensive sectors of agriculture, particularly those producing fruits, vegetables, and other specialty crops that American consumers demand, the challenge is compounded by the lack of a reliable domestic workforce. To sustain domestic production and keep American-grown food in grocery stores, agricultural employers increasingly have no choice but to rely on the H-2A temporary agricultural worker program. Without these essential workers, crops go unharvested and operations face severe economic jeopardy.

The H-2A program remains encumbered by significant regulatory complexity. Before a single worker arrives, employers must navigate a multi-agency process involving various state agencies, the Department of Labor (DOL), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the Department of State (State). When any link in this chain weakens, delays cascade across the system, imposing severe operational and financial consequences for growers and their workers. We respectfully request State take action to streamline your portion of the H-2A filing process by expanding interview waivers.

Our agricultural organizations are deeply grateful to the Trump administration for recognizing the realities of agricultural employment and taking decisive action. The Department of Labor's Interim Final Rule (IFR) on the Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR) restored economic rationality to H-2A wage requirements and is projected to save the sector \$17 billion over the next decade. Its positive impact is already being felt nationwide, lowering costs for farmers that can result in lower food prices. The IFR provided renewed optimism to farms and ranches of all sizes.

That is precisely the situation now unfolding, and it threatens to undermine the administration's efforts to improve the operation of the H-2A program.

DHS has undertaken a modernization effort by developing an electronic processing platform for H-2A users at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). We commend this initiative and appreciate the recognition that efficient, technology-enabled systems can better ensure government functions are performed faster and at lower cost.

However, technical issues with this process have emerged. As USCIS identifies and resolves these challenges, significant backlogs have developed. Because the H-2A system is sequential, once the delayed

cases become “unstuck” at USCIS, the bottleneck then shifts immediately to State, where resources are already strained.

Compounding these delays, State’s expanded screening of applicants with any driving-related duties has created severe processing backlogs at consulates. While our organizations fully support robust national security protocols, these broad administrative delays are preventing legal, vetted H-2A workers from reaching farms when they are needed most. Cumulatively, employers have incurred hundreds of thousands of dollars in costs for housing, food, and security as their workers wait in consular queues. As more employers begin processing workers this season, the strain will only intensify.

Fortunately, a proven and effective solution already exists: expanded visa interview waivers.

In 2020, the State Department under the Trump administration stated, “The expansion of interview waiver (IW) authorities since March 2020 has transformed the Department’s ability to process nonimmigrant visas securely and efficiently.”<sup>1</sup> This framework enabled State to balance national security requirements, unprecedented visa demand, and limited resources. Both State and DHS have since affirmed that waiving in-person interviews for returning, previously vetted H-2A workers serves the national interest.

Applying these authorities to workers who have already been vetted, have previously worked in the United States, and who have a clean record would significantly reduce pressure on consulates while fully upholding national security standards and ensuring farmers have access to their critical workforce in a timely manner. We respectfully urge the administration to immediately authorize and maximize the use of interview-waiver authorities for H-2A applicants. We also encourage you to pursue other avenues of regulatory relief that will help ensure the timely processing and arrival of these critical workers. Clearing these processing backlogs is essential to ensuring that fields are tended, harvests are secured, and America’s food supply remains stable and affordable.

A functional, efficient H-2A program is indispensable to the success of American agriculture and to maintaining the United States’ position as a food-secure nation. We respectfully request swift action and stand ready to work with you to advance a solution that supports American agriculture and the consumers who depend on it.

Sincerely,

National Council of Agricultural Employers

American Farm Bureau Federation

Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association

North Carolina Growers Association

Northwest Horticultural Council

U. S. Custom Harvesters, Inc.

USA Farmers Association

American Beekeeping Federation

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of State, A Plan to Address H-2A Visa Application Renewals: Report to Congress (Aug. 19, 2024).

Agriculture Workforce Management Association (AWMA)

American Sugar Cane League

AmericanHort

Controlled Environment Agriculture Alliance

Federation of Employers and Workers of America

International Fresh Produce Association

Milk Producers Council

National Association of State Departments of Agriculture

National Cotton Council

National Cotton Ginners Association

National Grange

National Onion Association

National Watermelon Association

North American Blueberry Council

U. S. Apple Association

USA Rice

Worker and Farmer Labor Association (wafra)

New England Apple Council

Snake River Farmers' Association

Valley Growers Co-Op Inc.

Western Growers Association

Alabama Nursery & Landscape Association

Arizona Nursery Association

Arkansas Farm Bureau Federation

California Citrus Mutual

California Farm Bureau

California Strawberry Commission

Colorado Farm Bureau

Colorado Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association

Colorado Livestock Association

Colorado Nursery and Greenhouse Association

Colorado Wool Growers Association

Florida Citrus Mutual

Florida Strawberry Growers Association

Florida Tomato Exchange

Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association

Georgia Green Industry Association

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Kansas Farm Bureau

Kentucky Farm Bureau Federation

Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation

Maine Landscape and Nursery Association

Maryland Farm Bureau

Maryland Nursery, Landscape, and Greenhouse Association, Inc.

Michigan Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Association

Michigan Asparagus Association

Michigan State Horticultural Society

Michigan Vegetable Council

Mississippi Farm Bureau

New Jersey Farm Bureau

New York Farm Bureau

North Carolina Sweetpotato Commission

Oregon Association of Nurseries

Oregon Farm Bureau	Illinois Farm Bureau
South Dakota Farm Bureau	Georgia Farm Bureau
Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation	Yuma Fresh Vegetable Association
Texas Agricultural Cooperative Council	Southeastern Cotton Ginners Association
Texas Citrus Mutual	The Minnesota Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association
Texas Cotton Ginners Association	The Minnesota Apple Growers Association
Texas Farm Bureau	Ohio Farm Bureau
Texas International Produce Association	American Mushroom Institute
Texas Vegetable Association	Arkansas Rice Growers Association
Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation	National Citrus Nursery Association
Frederick County Fruit Growers Association	Grower-Shipper Association of Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo Counties
Ventura County Agricultural Association	California Farm Labor Contractor Association
Marsing Agricultural Labor Sponsoring Committee, Inc.	Florida Growers' Association, Inc.
Washington State Tree Fruit Association	Idaho Hop Growers Association
National Christmas Tree Association	Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association
Independent Professional Seed Association	Idaho-Oregon Fruit and Vegetable Association
Mountain Plains Agricultural Service	California Association of Winegrape Growers
National Potato Council	New York State Vegetable Growers Association
Washington Winegrowers Association	Utah Farm Bureau Federation
New York State Horticultural Society	Michigan Farm Bureau
Grower-Shipper Association of Central California	Illinois Specialty Growers Association

CC: The Honorable Lori Chavez-DeRemer, Secretary, U. S. Department of Labor  
The Honorable Markwayne Mullin, Secretary, U. S. Department of Homeland Security  
The Honorable Brooke Rollins, Secretary, U. S. Department of Agriculture  
The Vince Haley, Director, Domestic Policy Council of the United States  
The Kevin Hassett, Director, National Economic Council of the United States