



# Immigration Reform: Achieving a Stable, Legal Workforce

2014

## Challenges

Meet future demand for food

Conserve and enhance water, soil, and habitat

Improve nutrition and public health

Strengthen farms and communities to improve livelihoods

## Initiatives

Food & Nutrition

Immigration Reform

International Development

Local Food

Next Generation

Research & Innovation

Risk Management

Working Landscapes

**We are an unusually diverse group of leaders from across the food and agriculture system.** Among us are conventional and organic producers of row crops, fruit and vegetables and livestock, environmentalists, international development experts, agricultural economists, scholars, food processors, retailers, multinational agricultural companies, and public health experts. We are optimistic about the future of agriculture because of the innovation and collaboration we see taking place on farms and in communities across the United States and around the world.

**Yet we also recognize that there are many challenges ahead and we have developed principles and recommendations to improve America's immigration system and build a more stable economic future for U.S. farmers, ranchers and their employees.** AGree's recommendations are directed to the U.S. government, producers and stakeholders in the supply chain. Our principles and recommendations draw upon a great deal of work and thinking by many individuals and organizations and articulate what must be achieved if American agriculture is to continue to be viable into the future.

### AGree's Immigration Reform Principles

1. Build a legal, more stable workforce in food and agriculture.
2. Develop a practical and economically viable guest worker program that allows employers to hire legal foreign workers and protects foreign and U.S. farmworkers.
3. Ensure quality of life, good working conditions, and opportunities for food and agriculture workers.
4. Provide more opportunities for farmworkers to develop skills and advance their careers within the food and agriculture sector.

and the environment, remain profitable to support communities across the country, and function more effectively and fairly for workers across the system.

Over the last 50 years, U.S. agricultural productivity has increased, and many farms and ranches have come to rely on hired, often foreign-born, farmworkers to meet their needs for both permanent and seasonal labor. The fact that many jobs are seasonal can make it hard for workers to earn a family-supporting wage. The time-sensitivity of many farm, ranch, dairy, and custom harvesting operations requires workers to be available precisely when they are needed to avoid loss. Thus, effective immigration policy is vital to the United States' economic health and to the resilience and livelihoods of rural and agricultural communities that rely on foreign-born labor.

A stable, legal workforce in food and agriculture is critical to meeting the future food needs of 9 billion people by 2050. A robust, skilled workforce ensures U.S. agriculture can increase productivity while simultaneously protecting natural resources

Eleven million foreign-born U.S. residents are undocumented. Nearly half are couples with children; and 4.5 million U.S.-born children are their sons and daughters.<sup>1</sup> Approximately 2 million foreign-born workers are part of the

farm workforce,<sup>2</sup> working in fields, ranches, and dairies. Of that number, at least half are estimated to be undocumented immigrants.<sup>3</sup> The Pew Hispanic Center estimates that 12 percent of food service workers are unauthorized immigrants.

Clearly our broken immigration system isn't just a problem for farmers and ranchers. All segments of the food supply chain and, indeed, most American businesses, from high tech industries to manufacturing, are feeling its impact and are appealing to Congress for action. Reform will be good for the economy. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates that immigration reform would increase U.S. GDP by 5.4 percent (\$1.2 trillion) over the next 20 years.

Dissatisfaction with the existing immigration system and its impact on the economy is widespread. The Executive Branch and Congress have clearly stated the need for reform. President Obama has recognized the importance of a stable workforce to "deliver food to our tables" and supports proposals to legalize undocumented immigrants currently residing in the United States.

On June 27, 2013, the U.S. Senate overwhelmingly voted in favor of S. 744, comprehensive immigration reform legislation that recognizes the food and agricultural sector's vital need for a stable, legal workforce and addresses the future economic and national security needs of the United States. Senators overcame long-standing differences in reaching a fair and workable solution to overcome a broken immigration system. AGree's support for comprehensive immigration reform was noted in the July 2013 White House report, "[Fixing Our Broken Immigration System: The Economic Benefits to Agriculture and Rural Communities.](#)"

AGree will continue to work to convince the House of Representatives that immigration reform is critical for the U.S. economy and to the future of American agriculture. In late January 2014, House leaders issued principles to guide their work on immigration reform and AGree was encouraged that the document specifically noted the labor challenges facing agriculture in the absence of reform. While the principles released by House leaders were a good first step and demonstrated that progress was possible, AGree will be working to help turn principles into legislation that works to the benefit of America's economic future.

## AGree's Immigration Reform Recommendations

1. Support bipartisan, comprehensive immigration reform, with particular emphasis on food and agriculture workers;
2. Support policies that both producers and farmworkers agree meet their needs and are fair;
3. Support reform that provides a path to earned citizenship for undocumented immigrants currently in the U.S., particularly those working in the food and agriculture sectors; and
4. Support development of a simple, efficient, and fair guest worker program that allows producers to hire seasonal foreign workers.

**Achieving a stable, legal workforce involves more than much needed immigration reform. Moving forward, AGree will continue to support efforts that:**

### Encourage new entrants to food and agriculture:

Encourage policies that provide adequate financial and career rewards to workers and producers while creating opportunities for young people, including the children of farmworkers, in agriculture. Work with educational institutions and professional and commodity-based organizations to help prepare the next generation of farmers and ranchers, food and agriculture scientists, and others across the supply chain.

### Recognize the importance of skilled labor in food and agriculture:

Provide incentives to employers to offer training opportunities to farmworkers seeking to progress to higher skill levels and to management and ownership of enterprises in food and agriculture.

**Improve the farm labor market:** Work with public and private actors to improve coordination within the farm labor market so producers have access to the labor they need, while ensuring family supporting wages for farmworkers.

### Encourage agricultural and rural economic development in the home countries of immigrants:

AGree is developing recommendations that support agricultural development as an integral part of U.S. foreign assistance to foster greater local agricultural productivity and rural economic development so that recipient nations create strong food and agriculture systems that are engines for job creation and economic growth.

<sup>1</sup> Passel, Jeffrey, and D'Vera Cohn. 2011. Unauthorized Immigrant Population: National and State Trends, 2010. Pew Research Hispanic Center.

<sup>2</sup> Martin, Philip. 2011. Immigration Reform: Implications for Farmers, Farm Workers, and Communities. Conference report presented May 12-13, 2011, at University of California, Washington Center.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Carroll, Ruth M. Samardick, Scott Bernard, Susan Gabbard, and Trish Hernandez. 2005. National Agricultural Workers Survey 2001-2002: A Demographic and Employment Profile of United States Farm Workers: 2001 – 2002. Chapter 1. U.S. Department of Labor. Available at: <http://www.doleta.gov/agworker/report9/chapter1.cfm#eligibility>.

Although all the individuals formally affiliated with AGree may not agree completely with every statement noted, they are committed to working together to find solutions to the challenges facing food and agriculture. AGree Advisors participated as individuals, not as official representatives of their organization.

## About AGree

AGree seeks to drive positive change in the food and agriculture system by connecting and challenging leaders from diverse communities to catalyze action and elevate food and agriculture policy as a national priority. AGree recognizes the interconnected nature of food and agriculture systems globally and seeks to break down barriers and work across issue areas.

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