

# ISSUES & INSIGHTS

## U.S. Pork Industry Needs a Viable Workforce

### SITUATION

The U.S. pork industry is suffering from a serious labor shortage, negatively impacting farms and processing plants. This challenge undermines a critical economic sector that in recent years has driven employment and wage growth faster than the overall economy and is key to prosperity in rural America. The U.S. pork industry is largely dependent on foreign-born workers. Unfortunately, current visa programs to bring in new employees or hire those already in our communities fail to meet the workforce needs of U.S. pork producers and other year-round livestock farmers.

The H-2A visa program, created in 1987 under the Immigration Reform and Control Act, allows a foreign national entry into the United States for temporary or seasonal agricultural work. Terms of work can be as short as one month and as long as ten months. The U.S. Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division is responsible for auditing and inspecting H-2A employers to ensure guest workers are not unfairly exploited. Employers of H-2A guest workers must provide inbound and outbound transportation, housing and meals for workers. Additionally, to be eligible for the H-2A program, employers must demonstrate a lack of U.S. workers who are able, willing and qualified for the jobs.

Because it is designed for seasonal agriculture, the H-2A visa program can't meet the workforce needs of livestock farmers. Without visa reform to support a viable, year-round workforce, U.S. pork production will be constrained, leading to higher food prices for consumers. Hog farmers and packing plants pay wages significantly above local prevailing wage rates and the shortage of labor, if not addressed, could lead to farms and packing plants shutting down, causing serious financial harm to the communities in which they operate. H-2A expansion to year-round labor is clearly needed to ensure that U.S. livestock agriculture can compete globally and continue to provide safe and affordable pork to Americans and consumers worldwide.

### NPPC POSITION

***NPPC supports visa system reform that provides agricultural employers with sustained access to year-round labor. NPPC is actively advocating for reform to the H-2A visa program that establishes a legal and productive workforce, as well as a pathway to legal status for those with agricultural experience already in the United States. NPPC also supports moving oversight of agricultural visa programs to the USDA.***

In addition to available workers outside of the United States, experienced, foreign-born agricultural workers are often already in our communities, but unemployable due to their immigration status. By extending multi-year status to those already in rural America to work in our nation's farms or packing plants, employers may be able to cover some of the labor shortage with easily accessible and experienced labor – without the costs associated with bringing in overseas workers.

It's important to note that U.S. pork and other livestock production jobs will not be filled by U.S. citizens due to declines in rural population growth where most farms and packing plants are located. Economists with Iowa State University, using a study from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service, determined that native-born workers and permanent residents cannot offset the need for foreign-born labor at present. Without a comprehensive solution, this issue is likely to cause increasing harm to the agriculture industry, leading to higher food prices for consumers.

### FAST FACTS

- The U.S. pork industry generates more than 550,000 jobs.
- From 2001-2015, pork production employment grew 2.1 percent annually, three times faster than the employment growth of the rest of the economy.
- Although there are job openings in the pork industry, most of those are in rural areas, which have declining populations.

### NPPC CONTACTS

- **Issue Manager:** Jack Detiveaux, Manager, Competition, Budget and Labor Issues, [detiveauxj@nppc.org](mailto:detiveauxj@nppc.org)
- **Congressional Staff:** Andrew Fisher, Manager, Congressional Relations, [fishera@nppc.org](mailto:fishera@nppc.org) and Jack Frye, Manager, Congressional Relations, [fryej@nppc.org](mailto:fryej@nppc.org); (202) 347-3600