

Modernize California's Agricultural Workforce

California agriculture relies on hundreds of thousands of farm employees each year to grow and harvest food. But The H-2A ag-worker program has not received comprehensive reforms in nearly 40 years.

Securing Agriculture's Workforce Act (SAWA) : H.R. 9535

This bipartisan bill introduced by House Agriculture Committee Chairman Glenn "GT" Thompson (R-PA) would be the first major revision of the H-2A program since 1986 if passed.

Key Provisions:

Expands the legal workforce by opening H-2A to entirely new sectors of agriculture

- Opens the H-2A ag visa program to year-round agricultural operations like dairies, livestock operations, and nurseries.
- Creates portable visas so workers can move between approved employers. Workers then remain legally employed and employers can fill unexpected labor shortages.

Stabilizes the Existing Agricultural Workforce

- Many experienced agricultural employees are already working on California farms but do not currently have a long-term legal status.
- Establishes legal pathway by allowing experienced ag workers to participate in the H-2A program.

Modernizes the Wage Formula (AEWR)

- SAWA uses an improved wage methodology and places limits on sudden wage increases.
- Provides farmers with greater certainty while continuing to protect worker wages.

Common Misconceptions

Does SAWA create "amnesty" for undocumented workers?

No. SAWA provides a legal pathway for experienced agricultural workers who are already helping produce America's food. Workers will be permitted to participate in the H-2A program and remain employed in agriculture. The goal is to stabilize the existing workforce—not create a broad immigration program.

Will SAWA take jobs away from American workers?

No. Federal law already requires employers to recruit U.S. workers before hiring H-2A employees. Jobs must be advertised, and qualified domestic applicants must be hired first. In 2025, employers advertised nearly 400,000 H-2A positions, yet fewer than 200 U.S. workers applied. SAWA does not displace American workers—it helps fill workforce shortages when domestic workers are unavailable.

California Producers That Could Gain Access to H-2A

Commodity	Number of Producers in CA
Dairy	1,100
Livestock	14,000
Poultry	4,300
Nursery	4,000
Greenhouse	2,700
Forestry	1,800
Aquaculture	400
Total	28,300

Source: USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), 2022 Census of Agriculture.

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