

Jawetz, Tom

From: American Farm Bureau Federation <valeriaz@fb.org>
Sent: Monday, March 02, 2015 7:45 PM
To: Jawetz, Tom
Subject: AFBF opposes the Legal Workforce Act

March 02, 2015

Representative John Conyers
United States House of Representatives
2426 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC
20515

Dear Rep. Jawetz:

The American Farm Bureau Federation opposes the Legal Workforce Act as introduced. As you know, our organization is deeply aware of the need for immigration reform and appreciates the opportunities you and your staff continue to provide us to work together on this issue. We value those efforts. However, because stand-alone E-Verify would have a significant negative impact on the agricultural sector, we do not support adoption of this legislation.

Farmers and ranchers have long experienced difficulty in obtaining workers who are willing and able to work on farms and in fields. Jobs in agriculture are physically demanding, conducted in all seasons and are often transitory. To most U.S. residents seeking employment, these conditions are not attractive. Farmers and ranchers seek access to the legal and stable workforce needed to harvest our fruits and vegetables, milk our cows and tend our livestock.

The risk of an enforcement-only approach is too high - and the impact on agriculture too great - to allow this legislation go through the process without informing you and all members of the negative impact of stand-alone E-verify. AFBF commissioned a study last year that measured the effect on agriculture of a systematic disruption in the agricultural labor market resulting from a loss of unauthorized workers. The resulting labor shortages of an "enforcement-only" approach would cause a \$30-60 billion loss of production and cause food prices to rise 5-6 percent, with domestic fruit production off by 30-61 percent and vegetable production down 15-31 percent. The livestock sector would also suffer lost production in the 13-27 percent range.

At the same time, we do not support an exemption for agriculture; such an exemption would not insulate producers from the harmful effects of the legislation and should not be viewed as an answer to our problem. We need a solution for our industry's labor issues. In fact, the agricultural sector has been asking Congress for a workable, effective agricultural worker program since at least 1996, when legislation was introduced in the Senate. We must have long-term stability for agricultural employers. Neither E-Verify, nor an exemption from E-Verify, speaks to this critical problem.

AFBF believes any federal mandates on employers to implement E-Verify must:

Be based on an employment eligibility verification system that is simple, conclusive and timely.

Provide an affirmative defense for employers who act in good faith.

Allow for status adjustment of workers not authorized prior to implementation.

Be preceded by full implementation of a usable agricultural worker program.

We are committed to working with the House Judiciary Committee on legislation that addresses agriculture's labor needs in a workable fashion. However, the negative risk of an enforcement-only strategy with no certainty of reform that provides a work authorization for experienced agricultural workers and a new, flexible guest worker program for long-term stability prevent us from supporting this bill.

Sincerely,

Bob Stallman
President