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Inglis meets with agricultural leaders to discuss illegal immigration

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U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis, right, meets Henry Gramling during his visit to Gramling Brothers Inc. in Gramling.

GRAMLING -- U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis said Monday that government officials must know more about the workers who are crossing the borders into this country illegally.

The national view is that the immigration system is broken, the congressman said.

"We've got to know who is here, why they are here and who they are," he said.

Inglis met with Upstate agricultural leaders on Monday to discuss ways illegal immigration is affecting the industry's local job market.

It's all a part of an effort by the Republican congressman to get a grasp on how legal and illegal immigration affect the Upstate community.

Inglis, who serves South Carolina's Fourth Congressional District, has met with health care, law enforcement and school system officials.

According to a recently released study by the University of South Carolina-based Consortium for Latino Immigration Studies, as many as 400,000 Central American and Mexican immigrants are living in South Carolina.

Upstate agricultural leaders said the average American citizen doesn't realize how dependent the economy is on the services of all workers -- not only in the agricultural industry, but also across the board.

While the issue of granting amnesty to workers who have been in the country for a certain period of time was a central discussion topic, it yielded no easy solutions.

Agricultural leaders said they understand the "flip side" of immigration -- where workers are contributing to industry and are helping their families.

"We need to be able to have a work force that is legal and at the same time be able to protect our borders," said Ben Gramling II, chairman of the board of Gramling Brothers, Inc.

The meeting was held in the office of Gramling Brothers and was attended by farmers, owners of landscape businesses and individuals working in the golf and recreational industries in attendance.

"Many people don't realize that without workers crops would not get harvested and that would potentially make us dependent on foreign food supply," Gramling said.

Inglis said he believes that rewards should not be given to workers who enter the country illegally and he discussed several ideas for confronting the issue.

He spoke of four guiding principles in regard to the issue.

Among those ideas were patrolling the borders, checking social security numbers online to see whether they match workers, creating an effective program for guest workers and raising the quotas for legal immigration.

During Monday's meeting Inglis sought answers for why Americans are no longer interested in

performing certain jobs in the agricultural industry.

Upstate leaders pointed to a philosophical shift in what jobs Americans are willing to work as well as the physical nature of some jobs.

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