



UNITED STATES SENATOR ★ SERVING THE CITIZENS OF IDAHO

LARRY CRAIG

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NEWS RELEASE

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SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE APPROVES FEINSTEIN/CRAIG EMERGENCY AG RELIEF PROVISION

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Legislation offered by California Senator Dianne Feinstein and Idaho Senator Larry Craig to address the nationwide agriculture worker shortage crisis was approved today by the Senate Appropriations Committee as part of the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations bill.

The Feinstein/Craig bill streamlines the current H-2A agricultural guest worker program and provides “temporary” immigration status for experienced farm workers over a five-year-period.

“We are continuing to tighten our border security, but at a time of accelerating food prices, we cannot deny consumers the abundance of American agriculture’s effort, for lack of a labor force,” Craig told the Committee. “Oranges are rotting on trees in Florida, and our crops are being moved and grown south of the border. If we want food security and food safety, we should be providing as much food as we can here, and we can’t do that with our current labor force.”

“We have been working for years to get comprehensive reform of our nation’s immigration policies, but that has not happened,” Craig said. “In the meantime, U.S. agriculture is becoming increasingly crippled by worker shortages – with some \$8 billion in crop losses already sustained and more ahead. This amendment is a clean, simple, temporary measure to solve an emergency in agriculture. It does **NOT** provide any amnesty path to citizenship; there are no green cards, and it would expire in five years to give Congress time to work out acceptable long-term reforms.”

Craig said the legislation would establish a temporary emergency agricultural program, capped at 1.35 million workers who would have to prove agricultural employment for at least 150 days or 863 hours or show they earned at least \$7,000 working in American agriculture during the past 48 months. Craig said that to be eligible, emergency workers also would have to pay a \$250 fine plus processing fees and would be required to work at least 100 days annually in agriculture over the next five years.

The consensus agreement which Craig said is supported by agricultural and employer groups across the nation also would streamline the current H-2A visa program’s application process by requiring the Labor Department to act within seven days on an employer’s request for H-2A workers. An application to extend a worker’s stay or change employers would be approved when filed.

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Craig said the H-2A wage standard would be frozen at the 2007 level for three years while a new fair wage standard is being studied. The housing requirement would be changed to allow an employer to provide an allowance if adequate rental housing is available. If housing is not required, employers no longer would be required to pay for workers' trips of less than 100 miles or for the cost of their transportation.

As under current law, the H-2A program would not be capped, but it would only admit foreign agricultural workers if they were matched to jobs that American workers had refused or were unavailable to perform.

The Emergency Supplemental Appropriations bill was reported out of the Appropriations Committee and is expected to be considered by the full Senate next week.