



A GROWN IN AMERICA THANKSGIVING REQUIRES A STABLE AGRICULTURE WORKFORCE.

THE ADMINISTRATION'S OWN WARNING

Just last month, the U.S. Department of Labor issued a stark warning in the Federal Register: America's food supply is at risk. The agency stated that **"the near total cessation of the inflow of illegal aliens" is threatening "the stability of domestic food production and prices for U.S. consumers."**

[Source: Washington Post, "Trump administration says immigration enforcement threatens higher food prices," October 11, 2025]

This wasn't a prediction from advocacy groups or speculation from economists. This was ***the Trump administration's own Labor Department*** acknowledging a crisis in American agriculture. The department's filing went further, noting that the current situation **"results in significant disruptions to production costs and [is] threatening the stability of domestic food production and prices for U.S. consumers."**

[Source: Farm Policy News, "Immigration Crackdown Hurting Ag, Labor Dept. Concedes," October 16, 2025]

The agency concluded that **"the Department does not believe American workers currently unemployed or marginally employed will make themselves readily available in sufficient numbers"** to replace the immigrant workforce that American farms depend upon.

And that, **"U.S. agricultural employers need a legal and stable workforce to support their farming operations, and persistent labor shortages and increases in production costs will only harm U.S. competitiveness, threaten food production, drive up consumer prices, and create instability in rural communities."**

[Source: Farm Policy News, "Immigration Crackdown Hurting Ag, Labor Dept. Concedes," October 16, 2025]

GROW IT HERE MISSION:

The Grow It Here campaign believes that the best way to keep American food affordable and available is to grow it here with a legal, stable agricultural workforce that includes temporary and immigrant workers who fill jobs that are essential but go unfilled by domestic workers. Our farmers sustain communities, preserve our agricultural heritage, and ensure food security for all Americans. But, as the Trump Administration made clear last month, they cannot do this work without workers.



THIS THANKSGIVING: A TIME TO RECOGNIZE THAT AMERICAN FARMERS NEED A STABLE AG WORKFORCE TO SURVIVE

As families across America gather for Thanksgiving dinner in 2025, the bounty on our tables represents the hard work of American farmers and their agricultural workers, many of them immigrants, who labor in difficult conditions to bring American-grown food to American families. Each dish from the turkey at the center of the table to the cranberry sauce, the green bean casserole, the mashed potatoes, the pumpkin pie, and the apple cider requires their dedication.

This Thanksgiving comes at a critical moment. Food prices have risen significantly in recent years, straining family budgets.

Out of about 2 million farmworkers in the U.S., government surveys show about 44% are undocumented.

[Source: Investigate Midwest, "Trump's deportations are causing farm labor issues," October 29, 2025]



American farmers and the essential workers who harvest our food face an uncertain future, and with them, the affordability and availability of the American Thanksgiving dinner itself hangs in the balance.

TURKEY



THE WORK BEHIND YOUR THANKSGIVING CENTERPIECE

Turkey production is far more labor-intensive than most Americans realize. Workers are responsible for the daily care of thousands of birds.

At operations like Jaindl Farms in Pennsylvania, workers perform tasks including "de-beaking and growing of turkeys; feeding, watering and cleaning turkeys to be free of feces and straw; catching, loading and unloading them as well as maintaining turkey housing," according to the farm's H-2A visa applications. The work involves constant exposure to animal waste, heavy lifting, and working in all weather conditions.

[Source: AP News, "Firm relies on foreign laborers to put turkeys on your table", May 5, 2017]

THE WORKFORCE CHALLENGE

In meat and poultry processing, estimates run as high as **50% of frontline staff being undocumented**, translating to as many as **270,000 workers** who currently handle everything from live animal intake to cutting, trimming, packing and sanitation. These are physically demanding, often dangerous jobs located in areas where local unemployment is near zero.

THE STAKES

Without reliable access to workers, turkey producers face impossible choices: leave birds untended, reduce flock sizes, or exit the business entirely. Each option leads to the same outcome: higher prices for American families and increased reliance on imported poultry.

APPLES

(A LOOK AT WASHINGTON STATE)



Washington State produces nearly seven in ten apples eaten in the United States. In a typical year, Washington's apple harvest produces a total economic impact of **\$7.5 billion** and supports roughly **60,000 jobs**.

[Source: KREM, "Washington 2025 apple crop looks strong, labor force not so much," August 2025]

Every single Washington apple is hand-picked, a job that requires workers to spend hours on ladders, carefully selecting fruit at peak ripeness while working against tight harvest windows and unpredictable weather.

Labor now accounts for about 60% of all operational costs in apple production, up from 45% in 2009.

[Source: My Edmonds News, "'Perfect storm' of factors hits Washington apple farmers," January 5, 2025]

THE 2025 REALITY IN WASHINGTON

Washington forecasted a record 142 million boxes of fresh apples for 2025, but growers warned that labor shortages and market conditions would likely drive down the actual number harvested.

[Source: Washington State Tree Fruit Association, "2025 Washington Apple Harvest Forecast," August 7, 2025]

Even with a bumper crop hanging on trees, apples will rot in orchards if workers aren't available to pick them.

THE WASHINGTON WORKFORCE

- Washington is home to more than **340,000 unauthorized immigrants**, many working in the agricultural sector.
 - [Source: Cascade PBS, "Can Washington's agriculture industry survive on H-2A workers?" June 19, 2025]
- H-2A guest workers rose from **85,000 in 2012** to over **378,000 by 2023**, expected to exceed **400,000 in 2025**.
 - [Source: American Enterprise Institute, "Immigration Enforcement and the US Agricultural Sector in 2025," April 16, 2025]
- H-2A program minimum wage in Washington State: **\$19.25, plus free housing and transportation**.
 - [Source: Columbia Basin Herald, "Experts preview 2024 Washington apple industry," March 20, 2024]

WHAT APPLE FARMERS SAY:

Jon DeVaney, President, Washington State Tree Fruit Association: "Challenging economic conditions including concerns about labor supply during harvest means that many growers will be more selective in what they pick. As a result, there is a high probability that the final harvested crop will be smaller than the potential reflected in this forecast."

[Source: Washington State Tree Fruit Association, "2025 Washington Apple Harvest Forecast," August 7, 2025]

Washington State University agricultural economics professor Jeff Luckstead warned: "What is this going to do to the price of apples? Any crop that utilizes these laborers, ultimately the price is going to have to go up. If input prices go up, the price of apples is ultimately going to have to go up and eventually the farmers are not going to survive."

[Source: Cascade PBS, "Can Washington's agriculture industry survive on H-2A workers?" June 19, 2025]

Linda Pryor, of Hilltop Farms: "The stakes really couldn't be higher. Fruits and vegetables ripen on nature's timeline, not ours. And without enough workers, crops rot in the fields. That means fewer healthy options in stores and higher prices for everyone."

[Source: Grow It Here, "Grow It Here :Official Launch," October 23, 2025]

GREEN BEANS

Green bean production for fresh market is almost entirely hand-harvested, requiring workers to bend or kneel repeatedly while picking beans at the right size. The harvest window is narrow, and beans must be picked multiple times as they mature, every 3-5 days for pole beans. Workers perform repetitive bending and reaching throughout the day, working in summer heat with fast-paced work to capture beans at optimal size.



LABOR INTENSITY

Labor needs for bush bean production are approximately 15 to 20 hours per acre, plus an additional eight hours per acre if irrigated. Machine-harvested bush beans can require from 20 to 50 hours per acre for harvesting, grading, and packing operations. Hand-harvested beans are labor-intensive and can require up to 300 hours per acre.

[Source: University of Kentucky Center for Crop Diversification, "Snap Beans Crop Profile," 2017]

A modest 10-acre green bean operation using hand-harvest methods could require up to 3,000 hours of labor, the equivalent of 1.5 full-time workers working year-round, compressed into just the harvest season. Without adequate workers, green beans simply don't get picked. Unlike mechanized crops, there is no backup option: no workers means no harvest.

“If we want secure, affordable, and sustainable food supply in this country, then we need an immigration system that is both economically and functionally feasible for family farms.”

Lisa Tate, Farmer and a Grow It Here Spokesperson



PUMPKINS

Pumpkin harvesting requires workers to hand-cut heavy fruits with sharp knives, lift and carry pumpkins (often 10-40+ pounds each), load trucks without damaging fruits, sort by size and quality for different markets, and complete field cleanup.

THE CHALLENGE

The pumpkin harvest window is extremely tight, typically just a few weeks in October when consumer demand peaks for Halloween and Thanksgiving. This seasonal crunch means farms need significant labor capacity for a very short period, making temporary and seasonal workers essential.



POTATOES

Potato production requires substantial manual labor for planting, field maintenance, sorting, and packing operations. Workers perform strenuous labor removing rocks from fields, operating harvest equipment, sorting potatoes by grade and quality, and packing for shipment.

Tasks include planting and cutting seed potatoes, field preparation and rock removal, operating harvest machinery, sorting on processing lines, discarding diseased or inferior product, and packing for shipment.



THE IDAHO POTATO INDUSTRY

Idaho is a major potato-producing state with significant reliance on immigrant labor.

Unauthorized immigrants **35,000** people of Idaho's population make up about

Source: Idaho Capital Sun, "Unauthorized immigrants are key players in Idaho's economy, agricultural sector," July 5, 2024]

THE H-2A REALITY FOR POTATO GROWERS

- **60%** of potato growers reported using H-2A labor in 2023, up from 22% in 2019, a huge ramp-up in reliance on temporary foreign workers
- **36.84%** of potato growers reported labor shortages
 - [Source: Spudman, "2024 Labor Report highlights grower concerns," 2024]
- Idaho ag employers submitted **1,200 applications** seeking a total of **5,600 H-2A workers** in 2020.
 - [Source: Idaho Farm Bureau, "Idaho's minimum H-2A rate increases 7 percent," 2021]
- Idaho H-2A wages: **\$16.54 per hour** in 2024.
 - [Source: U.S. Department of Labor SeasonalJobs.dol.gov, H-2A job posting, 2024]



WHAT POTATO FARMERS SAY:

"Wage requirements are difficult, but H-2A is necessary. Not enough local help."
"The H-2A requirements and wages are making the program tougher and tougher each year, but we have no choice in order to stay in business."

[Source: Spudman, "2024 Labor Report highlights grower concerns," 2024]

Andrew Mickelsen, a seventh-generation Idaho potato farmer, offers \$17 an hour and still cannot get local applicants.

[Source: CHS Inc., "H-2A program offers helping hands," March 21, 2024]

Berenise Gomeza, potato and onion farmer in Oregon/Idaho: "I can't find anyone locally to work in the fields, despite offering pay exceeding Oregon's minimum wage of \$14.20 per hour. If it weren't for the 20 foreign workers hired through the federal H-2A program, there's a chance many vegetables would have frozen and rotted in the fields."

[Source: CHS Inc., "H-2A program offers helping hands," March 21, 2024]



WINE



Wine grape production requires year-round skilled labor, from pruning vines in winter to hand-harvesting delicate clusters during intense harvest periods. Workers labor in extreme heat during summer months, performing repetitive tasks that require precision to maintain grape quality. Work includes vine suckering, shoot thinning, canopy management, leafing, crop thinning, irrigation, and hand-harvesting grapes at optimal ripeness, often at night or early morning during fall harvest.

California dominates U.S. wine production. The state's 850,000+ hired agricultural workers have an average of 8 years of education, average age of 42, and half are unauthorized. The 40,000 H-2A guest workers in California are legal Mexican men in their early 30s who work in California for an average six months and cost more than U.S. workers: \$25 to \$30 an hour including wages, housing, and transportation.

[Source: UC Davis, "California Farm Labor 2024," Philip Martin, April 4-5, 2024]

THE WORKFORCE

- In 2024, the AEWR for H-2A workers in California was **\$19.75 per hour**.
 - [Source: Agri-Pulse, "H-2A wages increasing in 2024," February 2, 2024]
- Wine grape general vineyard workers in California's North Coast (Napa, Sonoma, Mendocino counties) had a prevailing wage of **\$19.65 per hour as of 2023**.
 - [Source: Western Growers Association, "New Higher H-2A Wage Rate for Wine Grape General Vineyard Workers for CA North Coast," February 3, 2023]
- H-2A workers are **20 to 30 percent more productive** than U.S. workers and provide labor insurance because they are tied to employers by contracts.
 - [Source: UC Davis, "California Farm Labor 2024," Philip Martin, April 4-5, 2024]

CRANBERRIES

BOG HARVEST: UNIQUE AND LABOR-INTENSIVE

Cranberry harvesting is among the most distinctive forms of agricultural work in America. While wet harvesting (flooding bogs) has modernized the process, it still requires significant manual labor. Workers prepare and flood bogs, pull weeds and move pipes in the marsh, wrap and connect boom boards for harvest, corral floating cranberries with booms, load berries from water to trucks, and work in cold, wet conditions during fall harvest. Workers must be able to lift 50 lbs and work in all weather conditions.

[Source: U.S. Department of Labor SeasonalJobs.dol.gov, H-2A job posting for cranberry workers, 2024]



THE WORKFORCE

Wisconsin is a major cranberry-producing state and has seen significant growth in H-2A usage:

- Wisconsin's H-2A workforce has **increased six-fold** over the past decade according to 2024 state Department of Workforce Development data.
 - [Source: Madison.com, "Farmers turn to flawed visa program in search for legal labor," October 2025]
- Wisconsin saw **618 H-2A petitions approved** for employers in agriculture during 2024.
 - [Source: Business Daily Network, "Wisconsin sees 618 H-2A petitions approved," October 2025]
- Wisconsin's 2024 AEWR was between **\$18 and \$18.99 per hour**.
 - [Source: American Farm Bureau Federation, "2024 H-2A AEWRs On Their Way (Up)," November 2023]

CONCLUSION: SUPPORTING AMERICAN FARMERS

The evidence is clear, and it comes from the administration's own agencies: American agriculture cannot function without a stable, legal workforce that includes immigrant and temporary workers.

The U.S. agricultural sector, especially farms producing labor-intensive crops such as fruits, vegetables, and horticultural products, relies on unauthorized immigrants to perform many seasonal and routine tasks U.S. citizens will generally not do.

[Source: American Enterprise Institute, "Immigration Enforcement and the US Agricultural Sector in 2025," April 16, 2025]

The administration's own Labor Department has warned that 42% of the U.S. crop workforce is unable to enter the country, faces potential deportation, or is leaving the U.S.

[Source: Fortune, "Trump's own Labor Department quietly admits his immigration crackdown risks 'supply shock-induced food shortages' and higher prices," October 11, 2025]

This Thanksgiving, as we celebrate America's agricultural abundance, American farmers are ready to grow the food our nation needs. They're asking for one thing: the ability to access the workforce necessary to bring that food from field to table.

“As we gather around tables filled with family recipes- apple and pumpkin pies, sweet potato casserole, turkey and stuffing to celebrate all that we are thankful for, remember that farm workers make all of those delicious Thanksgiving dishes possible.”

Linda Pryor, Apple Farmer and a Grow It Here Spokesperson



GROW IT
HERE