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Chairman Goodlatte Introduces Ag Guestworker Bill

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Chairman Goodlatte Introduces Ag Guestworker Bill

Washington, D.C. – House Judiciary Committee Chairman Bob Goodlatte (R-Va.) today introduced the *Agricultural Guestworker "AG" Act* (H.R. 1773) a bill to provide American farmers with a workable temporary agricultural guestworker program that will help provide access to a reliable workforce. Chairman Goodlatte released the following statement on the bill's introduction.

Chairman Goodlatte: "Today's introduction of the *AG Act* is one piece that brings us closer to solving the immigration puzzle. While it is important that we reform our immigration system as a whole, we must look at each of the individual issues within the larger system to ensure that we get immigration reform right. If we fail to examine each issue methodically, we risk making the same mistakes of the past that have created the problems we face today.

"One component that needs fixing is our temporary agricultural guestworker program, which American farmers avoid using altogether since it exposes them to frivolous litigation and burdens them with excessive regulations. The new guestworker program created under the *AG Act* remedies this problem by removing red tape, streamlining access to a reliable workforce, and protecting farmers from abusive lawsuits. It also allows more participation in the guestworker program by opening it up to dairies and food processors, both of which often need access to foreign labor. In addition, the *AG Act* is good for those seeking a better life for their families by providing opportunities to earn a living while temporarily working in agricultural jobs U.S. citizens are not willing to do.

"By putting farmers in the driver's seat rather than Washington bureaucrats, they will be better equipped to compete in the global economy and continue growing our crops. It is vital that American farmers have access to a workable guestworker program now so that they can continue putting food on Americans' tables. We have to get this right so that farmers aren't burdened with another failed guestworker program for decades to come."

Original cosponsors of the *AG Act* include Reps. Trey Gowdy (R-S.C.), Blake Farenthold (R-Texas), George Holding (R-N.C.), Ted Poe (R-Texas), Lamar Smith (R-Texas), and Lynn Westmoreland (R-Ga.).

Key Components of H.R. 1773:

Eliminates Excessive Red Tape: The new temporary agricultural guestworker program removes barriers and excessive paperwork farmers face in hiring foreign workers. If a grower is designated as a registered agricultural employer by USDA and agrees to the terms and obligations of participating in the program, then they can easily hire guestworkers already admitted to the U.S. without having to file yet another petition for the individual worker. The new guestworker program's petition process is also attestation based, meaning that the grower simply has to promise to meet the program's standards rather than having to prove in advance that they will.

Protects Farmers from Abusive Litigation: In order to discourage frivolous and abusive litigation against growers, growers may require as a condition of employment that guestworkers be subject to binding arbitration and mediation of any grievances in relation to the employment relationship. This bill also eliminates special treatment for the Legal Services Corporation.

Enacts Market-Based Approach to Meet Demand and Supply: The bill eliminates the artificial government-imposed wage rate that is part of the current temporary agricultural guestworker program and replaces it with the prevailing wage rate or the state minimum wage—whichever is greater. And while the cap for the new program is set at 500,000, the Secretary of Agriculture has the authority to raise or lower the cap based on the demands and needs of the market.

Helps American Farmers Keep Up with Global Competitors: The new guestworker program will allow American growers to better compete in the global economy by removing the exorbitant costs associated with abusive litigation, excessive regulation, and artificially high, government-imposed wage rates.

Farmer Friendly: The bill designates the Department of Agriculture to administer the new guestworker program rather than the Department of Labor. USDA is better equipped to help farmers and better understands their needs.

Protects Taxpayers: Under the new program, guestworkers are not eligible for Obamacare, the Earned Income Tax Credit, the Child Tax Credit, or other welfare programs.

A summary of the bill can be found [here](#) and a copy of the legislation can be found [here](#).



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