

TEAM: FOOD & AGRICULTURE

Issue Experts:

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SUBJECT: STRENGTHENING AGRICULTURE THROUGH WORKFORCE STABILITY

REQUESTED ACTION:

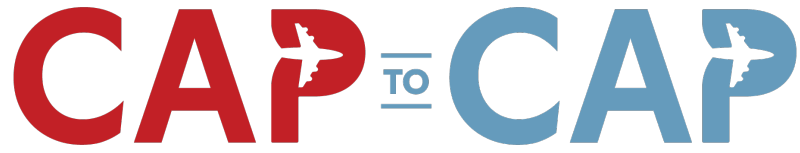
- Pass the Agricultural Workforce Modernization Act (AWMA) with strong Certified Agricultural Worker (CAW) provisions that establish a lawful work authorization pathway for experienced incumbent agricultural workers already essential to U.S. food production.
- Fully fund U.S. Department of Labor Registered Apprenticeship investments in agriculture, supporting earn-and-learn pathways for irrigators, equipment operators, mechanics, processing technicians, and frontline supervisors.
- Sustain and expand the National Farmworker Jobs Program (WIOA Section 167) and authorize agriculture-specific workforce training grants through USDA/NIFA to support upskilling, safety certification, and career advancement.
- Modernize H-2A guestworker program processes to reduce administrative burdens for seasonal operations while prioritizing retention of the year-round experienced workforce that California specialty crop agriculture depends upon.

HOW THIS SUPPORTS BUSINESSES:

California's agricultural sector generates approximately \$50 billion annually in direct farmgate revenue and supports more than one million jobs across food processing, transportation, and allied industries. Total U.S. farm production expenditures reached \$477.6 billion in 2024, with California alone, accounting for \$48.6 billion—more than 10 percent of the national total. Labor represents a core production cost exceeding \$51.8 billion nationally, with California's share proportionally higher due to its specialty crop mix and reliance on skilled hand labor. Workforce instability directly translates into unharvested crops, delayed field operations, and lost revenue that ripples through rural supply chains and local economies.



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The CAW provisions in the AWMA deliver the operational certainty that agricultural businesses require. Experienced workers—already present, already trained, and already essential—would gain stable legal status tied to continued agricultural employment, replacing an informal and unpredictable labor system with a transparent, enforceable framework. For vineyards, orchards, dairies, and diversified farms that operate year-round, this directly reduces the costs of labor turnover, recruitment delays, and compliance risk. Businesses gain a reliable, verifiable workforce that supports long-term planning, capital investment, and market commitments.

Federal apprenticeship and workforce training investments further strengthen the business case by developing workers capable of operating advanced irrigation systems, precision agriculture equipment, and food safety protocols. When workers advance into technical and supervisory roles, agricultural operations become more efficient and competitive. Protecting and expanding these programs reduces training costs borne by individual employers and creates shared infrastructure for workforce development across the region's agricultural community.

HOW THIS SUPPORTS RESIDENTS OF OUR REGION:

In the Sacramento Valley and Delta, agriculture anchors local tax bases, small businesses, and rural health outcomes. Agricultural workers and their families are long-standing members of these communities, contributing to local economies, schools, and civic life. Providing lawful work authorization through CAW status allows these residents to participate more fully in the formal economy—accessing banking, credit, housing, and healthcare—reducing the instability and vulnerability that comes with informal employment status. **A more stable workforce supports more stable communities.**

Workforce training and apprenticeship programs create direct pathways for residents to advance from entry-level field work into skilled technical, supervisory, and management roles—with corresponding wage progression. The National Farmworker Jobs Program and USDA workforce initiatives provide incumbent workers with safety certifications, equipment training, and career skills that increase earning potential and long-term economic security. For rural communities where agriculture is the primary industry, **these programs translate directly into higher household incomes and reduced reliance on public assistance.**



Maintaining a productive and stable agricultural sector also preserves the regional infrastructure—roads, water systems, processing facilities—and the network of farm-service businesses that support quality of life throughout rural communities. When farms curtail operations due to workforce instability, the economic effects cascade through local suppliers, equipment dealers, restaurants, and service providers.

Supporting agricultural workforce stability is therefore an investment not just in farming, but in the long-term vitality of the region’s residents and communities.

CONCLUSION:

California agriculture cannot remain globally competitive without a stable, skilled, and lawfully authorized workforce. USDA expenditure data confirm that labor is not a marginal cost but a central production input. Integrating lawful workforce authorization with robust federal training and apprenticeship programs offers a balanced, economically grounded solution that protects rural economies, strengthens food security, and ensures the long-term viability of California agriculture.

APPENDIX:

1. U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service. Farm Production Expenditures: 2024 Summary. July 2025.
2. California Department of Food and Agriculture. California Agricultural Production and Economic Impact Reports.
3. U.S. Department of Labor. Registered Apprenticeship Program Overview.
4. National Farmworker Jobs Program (WIOA Section 167). Program Description.
5. Agricultural Workforce Modernization Act (H.R. 3227 / S. 3599, 117th Congress).