



CLIFF BENTZ

Representing the 2nd District of Oregon

Congressman Bentz Supports Passage of Farm Workforce Modernization Act

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, Congressman Cliff Bentz (R-Ore.) voted in favor of [H.R. 1603](#) – the Farm Workforce Modernization Act of 2021, which passed the House of Representatives with bipartisan support 247-174. The bill goes to the U.S. Senate for consideration. Bentz was joined by 29 House Republicans in passing this legislation, which seeks to address the labor shortage faced by many food and fiber producers in Oregon’s Second Congressional District.

“As one who was raised on a cattle ranch in Harney County, I know firsthand just how much work must be done by those who work in agriculture. I have also spoken with local leaders across our district – including farmers, ranchers, orchardists, and producers; business owners; trade associations; and local governments. After many conversations and careful consideration, I agreed with my constituents that our district would benefit from the reforms this bill makes to the H-2A guest worker program. These reforms are important to ensuring that we have a stable and legal workforce to operate and raise the more than 200 crops produced in our state. In doing so, the bill will also help guard against future illegal immigration through a mandatory, nationwide E-Verify system for all agriculture employment,” **said Bentz.**

The bipartisan Farm Workforce Modernization Act provides reforms that have long been sought after by the agriculture sector to help streamline and reduce costs in the H-2A visa program. In the past, this program has been criticized for being cumbersome, inefficient, and slow. Despite these shortcomings, many in the agriculture sector rely on H-2A visas to help fill gaps in their workforce, grow our economy, and feed America. This legislation would also institute a mandatory E-Verify system for all agricultural employment – serving as a last necessary part of ensuring a legal workforce for the agriculture sector.

Across the Pacific Northwest region, leaders in agriculture have applauded Bentz's vote in support of the Farm Workforce Modernization Act:

Devon Wells, President of the Hood River County Farm Bureau, Walter Wells & Sons, LLC, a Century Farm – Hood River, OR

“Finding a stable workforce is a top challenge for growers in Hood River and The Dalles. Addressing that challenge is vital to our ability to continue producing apples, pears, and cherries. While not perfect, the Farm Workforce Modernization Act provides a pathway to legalization for current employees who are undocumented and makes needed changes to the agricultural guestworker program as an important step towards ensuring growers can access the employees needed to keep growing and harvesting crops into the future. I thank Congressman Bentz for standing up for fruit growers in the Gorge by helping pass this important legislation through the House, so that it can be further improved upon in the Senate.”

Warren Chamberlain, DairyLain Farms – Vale, OR

“We need a legal workforce in this country. My family made the investment in a robotic milking system five years ago because we could not find anyone that wanted to work, regardless of what the pay was.”

Kyle Fessler, President of the Oregon Association of Nurseries, Woodburn Nursery & Azaleas – Woodburn, OR

“The nursery and greenhouse industry is the top sector of agriculture in the state and passing the Farm Workforce Modernization Act is our top federal priority. Resolving the immigration issue has languished for 30 years and if we delay much longer, agriculture will not survive.”

Jim Simnitt, Past President of the Oregon Association of Nurseries, Simnitt Nursery – Canby, OR

“I have heard from the industry that if we had available and willing labor, the nursery industry could grow by 20 percent or more - there is that much demand for Oregon's nursery bounty. Instead, we plan for less than 2 percent growth due to the lack of labor. We are in crisis and by not acting on the Farm Workforce Modernization Act – Congress is deciding to place a cap on our economic ability to grow environmentally beneficial plants”

Mark Bigej, Past President of the Oregon Association of Nurseries and current Chairman of the OAN Government Relations Committee, Al's Garden & Home – Woodburn/Sherwood/Wilsonville/Gresham, OR

“We are a grower and a retail operation, and the Oregon Association of Nurseries is in favor of the Farm Workforce Modernization Act. There is a labor crisis in agriculture and the largest sector of agriculture is calling for congressional members to put aside partisan differences and do what is right – support our family farms.”

Jeff Stone, Executive Director of the Oregon Association of Nurseries – Wilsonville, OR

“I had a front row seat in 1988 as a US Senate staffer to see Congress fail to complete its mission to fill President Ronald Reagan’s immigration reform bill. As executive director of the Oregon Association of Nurseries for the last 11 years – passing sensible immigration legislation has been the top priority for the state’s billion-dollar nursery industry. The time is now to pass the Farm Workforce Modernization Act.”

**Chad Allen, Board Member of the Oregon Dairy Farmers Association,
Victor Dairy – Tillamook, OR**

“The US has the safest food supply in the world. In order to continue that, we must have people to work in Agriculture. The lack of a sustainable workforce is a big food security risk.”

**Shay Myers, Chief Executive Officer of Owyhee Produce – Nyssa, OR/
Parma, ID**

“It is a big deal that Congressman Bentz supports this legislation. For years, farmers across the nation have looked for and supported solutions for their businesses and employees. The Farm Workforce Modernization Act is a step in the right direction. It helps those who came here through a virtual open door. These workers are welcome and needed, and who have put in a tremendous effort to better their lives, provide food for every American, and a future for their children. We need these workers, and this legislation is the solution to the problem. This bill allows those who are already here and working to get legal worker status. It also allows for businesses to continue to hire H-2A workers, and for our industry to use E-Verify. E-Verify will prevent more undocumented workers from crossing illegally into the United States because they will no longer be employable.”