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Western Growers Calls on Obama to Push for Legislative Solution to Farm Labor Needs

IRVINE (February 11, 2010) - Western Growers President and CEO Tom Nassif responds to the Barack Obama administration's reversal of the Bush Administration's H-2A guest worker changes, which made it easier for farmers to hire temporary foreign workers to help pick their crops.

"Here we go again," Nassif said. "The Department of Labor is reversing the Bush Administration changes to the H-2A guest worker program, for the second time, which is likely to be met with a court challenge. This cycle never seems to end. Meanwhile our nation's farmers are stuck with regulations that are cumbersome and not workable because they are too costly and ignore the realities of farming. This mess underscores the need for a legislative solution. We have provided that solution to this administration — a solution that enjoys bi-partisan support, a solution that enjoys support from both farm owners and farm labor groups. This administration must take the lead and encourage Congress to pass AgJOBS.

"Even with an economy that is suffering through 10 percent unemployed, domestic workers are not applying for these jobs. We know our produce is going to be harvested by foreign workers, the question is, will it be here in the U.S. or will it be abroad? We are already dependent on foreign energy, do we really want to become dependent on foreign food? Our government officials have got to quit tinkering around with regulations and really address the problem; it's time to pass AgJOBS."

Western Growers is an 85-year-old agricultural trade association whose members from Arizona and California grow, pack and ship about half of the nation's fresh produce.

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