

Workforce Brief

Why It Matters

The fresh produce and floral industries depend on a stable and legal workforce to plant, harvest, pack, and move highly perishable products. Ongoing labor shortages, rising costs, and outdated guestworker policies are putting intense pressure on growers and threatening domestic production.

Quick Facts

- Specialty crop farms have among the highest labor costs in U.S. agriculture, with labor accounting for nearly 40% of total cash expenses.
- The H-2A program has grown 185% over the last 10 years as growers rely more heavily on legal guest workers.
- Application and compliance costs have increased substantially, 200% in the past 3 years, adding to the administrative burden on top of wage and housing requirements.
- Access to reliable labor is essential to avoid crop losses and maintain domestic production.

Background

Congress has not enacted meaningful modernization of the H-2A program in decades, even as it has become the primary legal workforce option for many growers. The current system remains costly, complex, and limited for some segments of agriculture. Without reform, labor challenges will continue to reduce competitiveness and increase pressure on growers, workers, and consumers.

IFPA Priorities

- Pass guestworker reform legislation that reflects the needs of specialty crop and floral producers.
- Expand H-2A eligibility so all producers can access a workable legal labor program.
- Provide greater wage predictability through Congressional action on the Adverse Effect Wage Rate methodology.
- Streamline H-2A processes to reduce cost, complexity, and delays.
- Remove the H 2B cap to help meet labor needs in eligible segments of the produce and floral industries.

Why Congress Should Care

- Labor shortages threaten domestic food production, raise costs, and contribute to food price pressure.
- A reliable legal workforce system supports growers, workers, and supply chain stability.
- Modernizing labor policy is essential to keeping fresh produce and floral businesses, competitive in the US.

