

KEY ISSUES

LABOR AND IMMIGRATION REFORM

Even as technology becomes a greater part of agriculture, much of dairy farming remains labor-intensive. U.S. dairy farmers rely on skilled workers to care for their animals, milk cows and tend crops.

Many dairy farmers struggle to recruit and retain native workers despite higher wages and benefits, making immigrant labor an increasingly important part of the dairy workforce. A [recent study](#) estimates that immigrants make up over one-half of all dairy workers. The uncertainty that undergirds agricultural labor and immigration in the U.S. continues to harm workers and their families, farm employers, rural communities and national food security.

Dairy farmers continue to face the same shortage of domestic workers as all of agriculture, but they do not have access to the H-2A farmworker program, which only provides for seasonal labor rather than the year-round workers dairy needs. Dairy farms will not be able to survive, let alone thrive, without a steady, reliable workforce. Congress must act to address dairy's labor needs and ensure a stable food supply.



OUR POSITION

NMPF strongly supports efforts to pass agriculture labor reform that provides permanent legal status to current workers and their families and gives dairy a workable guestworker program.

KEY POINTS

- Agricultural labor reform is long overdue and dairy farmers urgently need access to a stable, legal workforce.
- Immigrant labor accounts for 51 percent of all dairy labor, and dairies that employ immigrant labor produce 79 percent of the U.S. milk supply. If the U.S. foreign-born workforce, it would nearly double retail milk prices and cost the total U.S. economy more than \$32 billion.
- Dairy farmers cannot lose their current workers without massive disruption to their farms and to rural economies. Employees who have been working should be able to continue working and earn permanent legal status, as should their immediate families.
- The H-2A guestworker visa program, used by many in agriculture to attract seasonal foreign labor, doesn't fit dairy's year-round needs, but could be a program workable for dairy farmers.
- Through the National Dairy FARM Program's [Workforce Development program](#), dairy farmers are proactively implementing HR and safety management identifying which best practices are most useful to implement on their farm; and tracking improvement over time.

MORE INFORMATION

- [The Economic Impacts of Immigrant Labor on U.S. Dairy Farms](#)
- [FARM Workforce Development](#)
- [FARM Nationwide Labor Survey Report](#)

RESOURCES

**DAIRY DEFINED PODCAST:
WHOLE MILK LEGISLATION HAS 60%
CHANCE THIS YEAR, SEN. WELCH
SAYS**
May 19, 2025

**BOARD MEETING GATHERS
FARMERS READY TO FACE POLICY
CHALLENGES**
April 02, 2025

**2024 ANNUAL
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