

Statement of Areli Arteaga
Before the House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on
Immigration and Border Security
"Securing the Future of American Agriculture"
April 3, 2019

Chairwoman Lofgren, Ranking Member Buck, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Areli, and I am proud to have contributed and to be part of a family that contributes to feeding the rest of the United States and many parts of the world.

I was born and raised in Idaho. Most of my childhood and teenage years were spent on a dairy farm where my father worked. We lived in housing on the dairy farm. Dairy work is year round work and it's very hard to get any kind of break. My mother has worked as a seasonal farm worker in potatoes, of course this being Idaho, but also onions, corn, carrots. My first experience working in the fields was at the age of 9. I returned at the age of 15 and worked every summer until I had the opportunity to do an internship here in Washington, DC at the Department of Education through the College Assistance Migrant Program, also known as HEP/CAMP.

MY FATHER DAIRY

My father has worked in the dairy industry for over 25 years. Dairy work is very difficult, dangerous and requires skilled work. My father's work is focused on taking care of the health and welfare of each cow while helping provide milk and cheese to the region. My father typically works 12 hour days, six days a week although when they are short staff I have seen him work 2 weeks straight. As my father explained to me as a child, cows don't know about days off there are no holidays and no birthdays. I've seen my father wake up to emergency calls from work at 1, 2, and 3 in the morning to help care for the cattle. My father's duties include keeping the pathways clear for cattle, helping deliver baby calves, and I believe most importantly keeping the cattle alive. He is responsible for helping diagnose ill cows and then treating them. He has an extraordinary memory and attention to detail. He is able to identify cows through memorizing each cow located in different cow pins. This is extremely important because if that cow is being treated with medication they need to be milked separately so that the milk we drink is not contaminated. My father is proudest of when he has a sick cow in his work and the cow reacts in a positive way and he knows that he helped that animal survive.

MY MOTHER

While my father works year round like most people in the dairy industry, my mother works seasonally. For her the potato season is about six week in which they cut the seeds and later harvest. She then spends about six weeks corn detasseling. Something tough about the work in corn is that she and her coworkers have developed strong allergies affecting their health. She typically also works in the onions for about five months-- setting, repairing, and later removing the irrigation system and also weeding the onions. At other times in the year, working in the alfalfa fields, she will work with the bee boards by placing larva trays in bee houses after the harvest and place them in storage to use for following harvest. In a year there are times she will work in 3 to 5 of these crops, no matter rain, wind, hail they are out there producing our food for

the rest of us. She is proudest of being able to provide an education to her children through her work. Two of us have now graduated college and my youngest brother is doing well in school.

MY OWN EXPERIENCE WORKING IN THE FIELDS

What I learned in the fields is, it is not an easy task, it takes skill. One of the memories that has resonated with me still to this day was one day when we were working in an onion field. We were given the task to remove a weed that wraps itself around crops. We were not allowed to use a hoe because the onion was too young, it would pull the onion out of the ground. While I struggled while working on my knees for long hours my mother would loop by around to help me and try to teach me skills with the knife to help me catch up to the rest of the crew. It was then I realized I needed to get my college degree because my parents like other immigrants sacrificed so much for us to succeed.

I also was surprised when, after seeing my friends from college get paid time and a half after an 8 hour day when they worked in retail, that I wasn't paid for overtime hours for work that to be honest I see as a lot more difficult.

MY UNCLE

My uncle works on an H-2A visa for the last several years in alfalfa including raking and baling. He has come to Idaho from Mexico for five months each year.

SOME CHALLENGES...

For many years, as difficult as the work was, my father's work at the dairy brought stability for my family. But after years working at the farm where I grew up, my father felt he wasn't treated fairly and he knew it was time to leave-- and my family was stuck. I was in college but my (2) younger siblings were at home. My father knew that if he left the job, he also was giving up the family home. My father did what he thought was best and we found ourselves without a home. I do wonder what it would be like for a worker attached to an H-2A visa where an employer has total control of job, housing, and a visa.

IMMIGRATION REFORM

My mom and dad are proud of me and I feel pride in having graduated from the University of Idaho in 2017, with a B.S. in Economics and Political Science.

I am proud of my parents and my family because they came to this country with just the clothes on their backs, they now contribute to their community in many ways one of them being by their skilled jobs.

My family are all immigrants. And the people we work alongside are almost all immigrants. Wherever I go – I see people eating the food my family has harvested and drinking the milk my father has helped produce.

It seems the US immigration system doesn't make sense. I'd like to see my parents and family treated with some of the same respect they taught me to show to others.