



September 22, 2020

Chairwoman Zoe Lofgren
1401 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Ken Buck
2455 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Lofgren, Ranking Member Buck, and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of Clif Bar & Company, I submit this letter for the record in regard to the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship's hearing, "Immigrants as Essential Workers During COVID-19," which is scheduled to occur on September 23, 2020.

Americans are experiencing a shock wave of food anxiety and insecurity unlike any since the Great Depression. Food banks nationally are struggling to meet demand amid high unemployment while government benefits expire.

As bad as things are now, without the continued efforts of our farmworkers nationwide, the situation would be much worse. Yet we often do not think about the people who labor on farms, ranches, and dairies during the pandemic to provide us with our food.

At Clif Bar & Company, we believe our nation's collective food security and health are inextricably linked to the well-being of these laborers and their families, groups who are frequently forgotten as we're perusing the aisles of still-available fresh produce while we shelter in place. Recent fires in California have placed these workers and families under even greater risk.

The food system simply cannot function without farmworkers, yet we have thus far failed to consider



them adequately in policy decisions around COVID-19 and the ensuing health and economic fallout.¹

This must change now.

We urge Congress and the administration to quickly work to craft solutions to these multi-faceted issues that weaken our food security, create unnecessary risk to our agriculture and food economies, and fail to respect the dignity of our fellow humans.

In 2019, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 5038, the Farm Workforce Modernization Act, which would create improved workforce stability for farmers in need of labor and provide undocumented farm workers and their family a pathway to legal citizenship. If the Senate does not pass this important bill by the conclusion of 2020, we believe the 117th Congress should pass this bill and send it to the President's desk for signing within the first 100 days.

This is not purely a federal concern, either. State governors and legislators can and should act to increase protections for farmworkers as essential workers. While some steps have been taken in some states to prevent transmission of COVID-19 and address the needs of those who become ill or lose their jobs due to the pandemic, most states have not taken sufficient action. Unfortunately, the benefits of most state and federal programs only apply to people with lawful permanent residency or citizenship, which constitutes the minority of farmworkers in California and in America.

Businesses cannot sit idle waiting for government answers. Some are taking action. Clif Bar & Company has been vocal in encouraging grocers, manufacturers, farmers, and customers to do what they can to alleviate the risk and strain being put on the men and women who help grow our food. Clif Bar & Company reallocated budgets from the Clif Ag Investment Fund to provide funding for nonprofits that serve farmworkers with medical services, groups such as the Migrant Clinicians Network and United Farm Workers Foundation.

The company is also collaborating with groups like Farmworker Justice (FJ) to promote government policies to bring a greater measure of fairness to the fields. We ask companies and individuals to join us in making similar contributions. FJ continues to advocate in Congress and the Administration and assists local advocates around the country in seeking occupational safety protections and resources to prevent and address COVID-19. FJ has collaborated with funders and volunteer face mask producers to distribute over 30,000 cloth face masks to farmworker groups around the country. Farmworker groups around the country rely on FJ for information about the pandemic and the organization remains active in corporate social responsibility projects that engage retailers, farmers, and farmworkers in win-win solutions.

¹ Helena Bottemiller Evich, Ximena, Bustillo, Liz Crampton, *Harvest of shame: Farmworkers face coronavirus disaster*, Politico (Sept 9, 2020), <http://www.politico.com/news/2020/09/08/farmworkers-coronavirus-disaster-409339>

At a time when we are faced with the sobering reality that racial injustice occurs in our communities, we must also look to the racial components of our failure to act to ensure protection and respect for the primarily black, indigenous, and Hispanic farmworkers who feed us: Jamaican and Haitian guest workers harvesting our blueberries in Maine;² Zapoteco workers picking our strawberries in California³ and Immokalee in the tomato field of Florida⁴, and the Mexican, Guatemalan and other Hispanic workers that work in our dairies, orchards, and vegetable fields⁵.

Poverty among these farmworker families means that many cannot afford the fresh produce they harvest. They deserve to be seen and considered. They deserve respect and to be treated with dignity.

No one should have to live in fear about lack of food, but those who produce our food should also not suffer from poor business practices and government policies. The solution to an efficient food system and vibrant family farms cannot be built on an equation of inequity and vulnerability. Choosing to forget is the first step in denying the dignity of our neighbors, and in ignoring our responsibility to treat others as we would wish to be treated.

We urge Congress to help farmworkers and their families, including migrants, during this pandemic. We cannot afford to turn our backs on those who help feed America.

Sincerely,



Matthew Dillon
Vice President, Government Relations & Social Impact
Clif Bar & Company

cc: Members of the U.S. House Immigration and Citizenship Subcommittee

² Evan Popp, *As harvests begin, Maine farmworkers may be at risk from virus*, Beacon (Aug. 25, 2020), <https://mainebeacon.com/as-harvests-begin-maine-farmworkers-may-be-at-risk-from-virus/>

³ Andrea Castillo, *Farmworkers face coronavirus risk: 'You can't pick strawberries over Zoom'*, Los Angeles Times (Apr. 1, 2020), <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-04-01/california-farmworkers-coronavirus>

⁴ *About CIW*, Coalition of Immokalee Workers, <https://ciw-online.org/about/>

⁵ *Farmworker Health Factsheet*, National Center for Farmworker Health, Inc., http://www.ncfh.org/uploads/3/8/6/8/38685499/fs-migrant_demographics.pdf