

Western States Dairy Producers Association

P.O. Box 6299 • Roswell, NM 88202 • 575/802-5966 • TELEPHONE

March 2, 2026

The Honorable John Thune
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: Urgent Legislative Action on Agricultural Labor Reform

Dear Majority Leader Thune:

The undersigned state and national organizations representing the nation's dairy farmers write to express our immediate and urgent concern regarding the worsening agricultural labor crisis. This issue has reached a critical tipping point: farms across the country are unable to secure the workforce necessary to sustain operations, threatening not only the viability of individual farms but also the stability of our national food supply. Without swift legislative action, the consequences will be felt across the economy—from rising food prices to supply chain disruptions. We urge you to act now to address this crisis before it deepens further.

The agricultural sector is facing an acute labor shortage. According to the U.S. Department of Labor's National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), over 56% of U.S. crop workers are foreign-born, and a significant portion lack stable work authorization, contributing to workforce instability.¹

The Department of Labor has also reported that total non-farm payroll employment has stagnated, with unemployment hovering around 4.3%, and long-term unemployment accounting for over 25% of all unemployed persons.²

Labor shortages are particularly acute in the dairy sector, which requires a year-round workforce to care for animals, manage milking operations, and maintain food safety standards. According to USDA's August 2025 Livestock, Dairy, and Poultry Outlook, milk production is forecast to increase to 230 billion pounds in 2025, yet producers face mounting pressure from labor costs and workforce instability.³ Unlike seasonal crop operations, dairy farms cannot rely on temporary labor cycles, making the lack of legal, year-round workers a direct threat to operational continuity and food security.

We commend the Trump Administration for its success in securing the southern border. Under President Trump's leadership:

- Illegal crossings dropped to historic lows, with only 26,197 total encounters nationwide in August 2025, a 93% decrease from the peak under the previous administration.⁴

¹ <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/national-agricultural-workers-survey>

² https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/economicdata/empsit_09052025.pdf

³ https://ers.usda.gov/sites/default/files/_laserfiche/outlooks/113151/LDP-M-374.pdf?v=88151

⁴ <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/nationwide-encounters>

- In May 2025, Border Patrol released zero illegal aliens into the interior, down from 62,000 in May 2024.⁵
- As of September, zero parole releases were recorded for four consecutive months, ending mass catch-and-release practices.⁶
- In June 2025, total encounters nationwide fell to 25,228, the lowest monthly total in CBP history, and only 136 apprehensions were recorded on June 28, the lowest single-day total ever recorded.⁷
- Drug interdictions surged, with fentanyl seizures increasing 3% in June and methamphetamine seizures up 102%, reflecting enhanced border control.⁸

These achievements reflect a whole-of-government commitment to national security and the rule of law. With the border now secure, it is time to turn our attention to the domestic consequences of these policies.

Dairy farmers have been advocating for immigration reform for more than two decades. Farmer-led advocacy groups, including the signatories to this letter, have consistently called for legislative solutions that recognize the unique labor needs of year-round livestock operations. From the AgJOBS proposals of the early 2000s to recent support for the Farm Workforce Modernization Act, dairy producers have worked in good faith with lawmakers across the aisle to craft practical, humane, and economically sound reforms. Despite these efforts, Congress has yet to deliver a solution, leaving dairy farms vulnerable to workforce disruptions and economic instability.

Farmers—particularly in labor-intensive sectors like dairy—are struggling to maintain operations due to a lack of legal, year-round workers. Without reform, the U.S. risks a food crisis driven by labor shortages.

We urge you to lead a bipartisan effort to enact agricultural labor reform that:

- Modernizes the H-2A visa program to include year-round agricultural operations.
- Provides legal status for long-term agricultural workers already contributing to our food system.
- Provides for an adequate number of lawful foreign workers for future agricultural needs.

This moment presents a unique opportunity to pair border security with workforce stability. We believe that proactive Congressional leadership—especially from your office—can help deliver a solution that supports farmers, protects workers, and strengthens our food supply chain.

⁵ <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/national-media-release/cbp-releases-may-2025-monthly-update>

⁶ <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/national-media-release/trump-administration-delivers-4-straight-months-0-releases-border>

⁷ <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/national-media-release/most-secure-border-history-cbp-reports-major-enforcement-wins-june>

⁸ <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/drug-seizure-statistics>

We stand ready to collaborate with your office and other stakeholders to craft and support legislation that meets the needs of American agriculture while respecting the integrity of our immigration system.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and for your continued support of America's farmers.

Sincerely,

Agriculture Council of California
Agri-Placement Services, Inc.
American Agri-Women
American Dairy Coalition
Arizona Cotton Growers Association
Arizona Dairy Producers Association
AMPI – Associated Milk Producers Inc.
Colorado Dairy Farmers
Cooperative Milk Producers Association
Dairy Producers of New Mexico
Dairy Producers of Utah
Edge Dairy Farmer Cooperative
FARE Idaho
Food Northwest
Foremost Farms USA
Georgia Farm Bureau
Georgia Milk Producers
Hilmar Cheese Company, Inc.
Idaho Dairymen's Association
Indiana Beef Cattle Association
Indiana Dairy Producers
Idaho Grain Producers Association
Idaho Onion Growers Association
Idaho-Oregon Fruit & Vegetable Association
Intermountain Milk Processors Association
International Dairy Foods Association
Iowa State Dairy Association
Kansas Dairy Association

Kansas Livestock Association
Lone Star Milk Producers
Magic Valley Quality Milk Producers
Maola Local Dairies Inc.
Milk Producers Council
Minnesota Milk Producers Association
Nebraska Milk Producers Non-Stock Cooperative
Nebraska State Dairy Association
New Mexico Farm & Livestock Bureau
New York State Flower Industries
Northeast Dairy Producers Association
Northwest Dairy Association
Ohio Dairy Producers Association
Oregon Association of Nurseries
Piedmont Milk Sales
Snake River Sugarbeet Growers Association
Oregon Dairy Farmers Association
South Dakota Dairy Producers
South East Dairy Farmers Association
Southeast Milk, Inc.
Specialty Crop Farm Labor Contractors, LLC
Texas Association of Dairymen
United Dairy Farmers of Florida
United Dairymen of Arizona
Upstate Niagara Cooperative, Inc.
Venture Dairy Cooperative
Washington State Dairy Federation
Western States Dairy Producers Association
Wisconsin Dairy Alliance

cc: President Donald J. Trump
Secretary Brooke Rollins
Secretary Lori Chavez-DeRemer