

MESSAGE FROM MARSHA

LAWMAKERS HELP FARMERS AND RANCHERS IN COLORADO

Agriculture is a vital part of Colorado's future, playing a unique role in our economic strength, providing over 100,500 jobs and generating over \$16 billion dollars of economic activity annually. As part of that economic engine, Colorado has the distinction of being ranked 16th largest agriculture producer in the United States.

El Paso County ranks 25th in agriculture production, and contributes over \$32 million dollars annually to the state's economic prosperity. Most of the production in El Paso County is from Eastern El Paso County, and is in our House District 19. I am thankful for the cattle & dairy producers, and the nurseries in El Paso County for providing beef, dairy products, fruits and vegetables to the families of Colorado and the United States.

The farmers and ranchers help to feed the world, exporting nearly \$1 billion dollars in food products annually. Colorado's agriculture industry requires an estimated 9,000 seasonal workers annually and faces critical shortages of seasonal workers.

The purpose of this bill is to establish a Pilot Program to expedite the application, screening and approval process for the federal H-2A program and enhance protections for employers, workers and the public and in a timely manner meet the demands of Colorado farmers and ranchers.

In addition to requirements already set forth under the federal H-2A program, the Colorado Nonimmigrant Agricultural Seasonal Worker Pilot Program adds the following provisions to provide additional accountability, enforcement and oversight.

EACH WORKER SHALL COMPLETE AN APPLICATION/CONTRACT TO ALLOW OR REQUIRE THE FOLLOWING:

- Provide fingerprints and a photograph to the CBI for background checks paid for by the applicant.
- Submit to a thorough medical screening prior to application approval.
- Allow the Colorado Dept. of Labor to withhold 20% of the worker's earned wages to be refunded when the worker returns to their country of origin.
- Require worker to notify employer within 24 hours if worker is sick/injured or unable to work temporarily for any reason.

EACH EMPLOYER SHALL:

- NOT reject any U.S. worker or terminate any U.S. worker from employment in favor of a foreign worker participating in this Pilot Program.
- Comply with federal provisions of the H-2A program regarding housing, wages, hours, transportation fees, and all other existing requirements.
- Assure that employment of foreign seasonal workers under this Pilot Program will not adversely impact the wages and working conditions of U.S. workers.
- Notify the Dept. of Labor and law enforcement within 48 hours if employee cannot be located.

Any person violating the program provisions shall be guilty of a misdemeanor punishable by a fine of not to exceed five thousand dollars, imprisonment for no more than 6 months, or both!

The Colorado Nonimmigrant Agricultural Seasonal Worker Pilot Program is an effort to save Colorado's agriculture economy from further harm, Colorado's farmers and ranchers from losses and closures due to seasonal labor shortages, and to provide Colorado consumers with the finest products in the world at a reasonable price.

If you have any questions, comments please contact me today at MarshaLooper@gmail.com, or call me at 238-5600. For information on previous articles please go to WWW.GOMARSHA.ORG, click messages. Thank you for the privilege of serving you!

Marsha Looper,
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