



# Capital Press

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## State Department resumes issuing guestworker visas

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

After a nine-day delay, the U.S. State Department is again issuing visas to Mexican farmworkers stranded at the U.S.-Mexican border wanting to head north for jobs.

But not without complications.

A computer hardware failure earlier this month prevented embassies and consulates worldwide from processing visa and passport applications.

That left thousands of workers waiting in Mexico to get their H-2A visas.

Visas were issued June 17 for a majority of some 200 people headed to Washington state to work in cherry harvest and other tree fruit work, Dan Fazio, director of the Washington Farm Labor Association in

Olympia, said.

On June 22, three more workers for WAFLA were delayed despite the organization being willing to pay \$591 extra per worker for their waiver, Fazio said.

Customs and Border Protection of the Department of Homeland Security said the workers needed a travel letter from the consulate, Fazio said.

"The consulate was unable to provide travel letters for these three workers but could not tell us why," he said. "The most logical theory we heard was that CBP had requested the consulate limit the number of travel letters each day so the border would not be overwhelmed."

Steve Scaroni, owner of Scaroni Family of Companies, El Centro, Calif., said Tuesday that

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## IDAHO NEGOTIATIONS SEEK TO STAVE WATER CALLS

Averting curtailments critical in maintaining ag, industry

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

BOISE — State leaders say Idaho's economic future hangs in the balance as surface water and groundwater users seek to hammer out terms of a tenuous agreement resolving a decade-old water call.

Irrigators with the Surface Water Coalition filed the call against junior well users on the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer in response to the role of their pumping on declining spring flows into the Snake River from Blackfoot to Milner Dam.

Rather than pursuing a solution to eek through a single season, as in the past, the sides have proposed a monumental plan to address

underlying causes behind the unsustainable groundwater outlook, thereby averting future water calls.

They agree failure to act would leave Idaho on a path toward a depleted aquifer and well curtailments that would devastate farms and industries from Magic Valley to Ashton. State political leaders, including Gov. Butch Otter and

House Speaker Scott Bedke, have taken a lead role in facilitating negotiations. "I am optimistic we'll have a valid, defensible proposal that each of these entities can take back to their boards and put on the table," said Bedke, an Oakley farmer and rancher who is acting as mediator in the

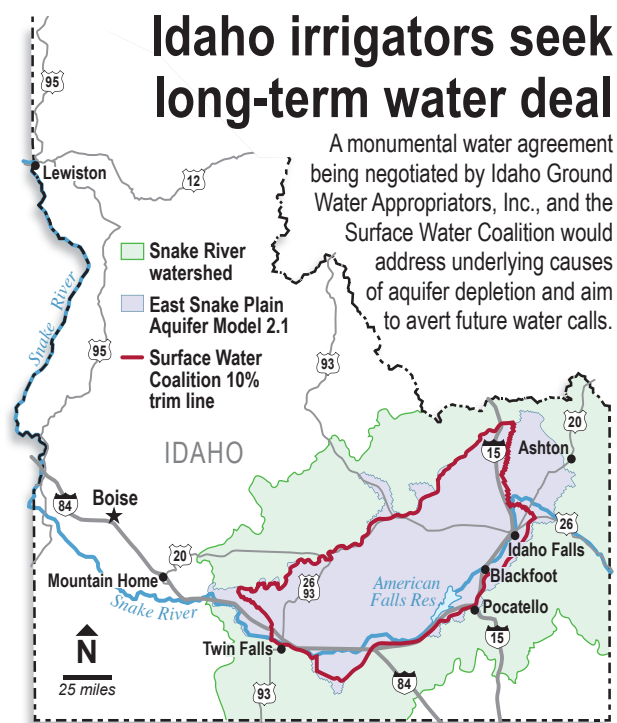
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Bedke

## Idaho irrigators seek long-term water deal

A monumental water agreement being negotiated by Idaho Ground Water Appropriators, Inc., and the Surface Water Coalition would address underlying causes of aquifer depletion and aim to avert future water calls.



Source: Idaho Dept. of Water Resources

Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

TOP PHOTO: Canal water flows out of the Lowline/Rock Creek inverted steel syphon that dates back to 1904 at 1,300 cubic feet per second in Twin Falls County on June 18.

Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press



John O'Connell/Capital Press

Seed potatoes are loaded into a planter April 13 at a Wada Farms field in Eastern Idaho. The United Potato Growers of America and affiliated companies and organizations have agreed to pay \$25 million to settle allegations it violated antitrust law by acting as a cartel to raise prices.

## Potato growers reach \$25 million antitrust settlement

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
AND JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

A potato growers' cooperative has agreed to pay \$25 million to settle allegations that it violated antitrust law by acting as a cartel to raise prices.

Under the deal, which was granted preliminary approval by a federal judge on June 17, the United Potato Growers of America and affiliated companies and organizations must pay \$19.5 million to grocers and \$5.5 million to consumers.

Apparently, however, the

agreement won't put the legal issue to rest. One of the major plaintiffs, Kansas-based Associated Whole Grocers, issued a press release June 23 indicating it will not participate in the settlement.

"AWG's individual action alleges that the defendants engaged in various supply-control and price-fixing practices designed to raise the price of fresh and processed potatoes in violation of the Kansas Restraint of Trade Act and the Sherman Act," the statement reads. "AWG's case continues pretrial proceedings in the District of Idaho before being returned to federal court in Kansas for trial."

UPGA President and CEO Jerry Wright said the court is now establishing provisions under which other plaintiffs may opt out of the settlement.

Under the settlement, the defendants have also agreed to cease any attempt to manage potato acreage prior to planting for seven years.

In 2010, the cooperative and numerous growers were the target of a lawsuit by the Jamestown, N.Y., potato buyer Brigiotta's Farmland Produce and Garden Center for allegedly constraining potato production to artificially inflate prices. Associated Wholesale Grocers filed a similar suit in 2013.

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File photo

A corn field is irrigated in 2013 near Twin Falls, Idaho.

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Raisin program is unconstitutional

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NW cherry growers report lighter crop

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