

Ag labor bill needs guestworker reform, employers say

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

A new Democratic bill to give legal status to illegal immigrant farmworkers is positive but lacks any foreign guestworker reform, says Michael Marsh, president of the National Council of Agricultural Employers.

The Agricultural Worker Program Act of 2019, H.R. 641, was introduced in the House, Jan. 17, by Rep. Zoe Lofgren, D-Calif., with a companion bill in the Senate by Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif.

Farmworkers who have worked in agriculture at least 100 days in the past two years, pass background checks and pay a fine could obtain blue card legal work



Michael Marsh

would be eligible to adjust to lawful permanent residency or green card status.

The bills are supported by the United Farm Workers and Farmworker Justice.

“This is very similar to the agricultural component of the Senate bill of 2013 in that it takes care of the existing workforce, but it needs to address guestworker reform to take care of the flow of future workers,” Marsh said.

The concern is that as

status. Those who maintain that status for three to five years, depending on hours worked in agriculture, would be eligible to adjust to lawful permanent residency or green card status.

existing domestic farmworkers retire there aren’t sufficient workers to replace them so guestworker improvements are needed to ensure adequate labor, Marsh said.

Specifically, changes are needed to allow H-2A-visa guestworkers to stay longer than 10 months at a time to work at dairies, greenhouses and in mushroom production, he said.

“Michael makes a good point that a workable package needs to address both the current workforce and future needs,” said Jon DeVaney, president of the Washington State Tree Fruit Association in Yakima and Wenatchee, Wash.

“If Rep. Lofgren is interested in adding meaning-

ful guestworker reform, we would be happy to work on permanent residence status for undocumented farmworkers,” said Dan Fazio, director of the farm labor association WAFLA.

Tom Nassif, president and CEO of Western Growers, Irvine, Calif., issued a statement applauding Feinstein and Lofgren’s efforts but saying a new guestworker program is needed.

Acute labor shortages plague production agriculture and farmwork is challenging work that most native-born Americans are not interested in doing, Nassif said.

“Solving the immigration crisis is a priority and necessity for the agricultural industry and we need legis-

lation that will create a new guestworker visa program and provide a workable path to legalization for our existing workforce and their families,” Nassif said.

Western Growers represents farmers in California, Arizona, New Mexico and Colorado who grow about half the nation’s fresh fruits, vegetables and tree nuts.

Mark Powers, president of the Northwest Horticultural Council, Yakima, said he looks forward to working with Feinstein and Lofgren and other members of Congress to fix a broken immigration system and views the bills as a starting point.

Marsh said the House bill will go to the Judiciary Committee’s subcommit-

tee on Immigration and Border Security, chaired by Lofgren, where it will pass. It may pass the full House but probably faces greater uncertainty in the Senate, he said.

NCAE has no position on the bills at this point but will discuss them at its annual board meeting, Feb. 5-7, in Washington, D.C., he said, adding he’s heard of no other bills addressing the supply of farm labor.

A dozen senators and 61 House members support the bills. All are Democrats. Supporters include Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley and Reps. Earl Blumenauer and Suzanne Bonamici, all of Oregon. Another backer is Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash.



2019 Cherry King Mike Willett, center, with his wife, Laura, and son, Nick, and 2018 Cherry King Lynn Long and his wife, Marlene.

Willett crowned cherry king

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

YAKIMA, Wash. — Mike Willett, manager of the Washington State Tree Fruit Research Commission, was crowned the 75th cherry king at the annual Cherry Institute of Northwest Cherry Growers at the Yakima Convention Center on Jan. 18.

Willett’s career in Northwest tree fruit started with picking peaches at an Orondo orchard in 1969 when he “slept in a ditch” and will end 50 years later this summer when he retires as commission manager, said B.J. Thurlby, president of Northwest Cherry Growers, the industry’s promotional arm.

The main part of Wil-

lett’s career was 20 years at the Northwest Horticultural Council in Yakima, where he began as technical issues manager in 1996 and spent many years as vice president of scientific affairs before leaving in December 2015 to become manager of the research commission.

At NHC, he worked on many market access and free trade issues, including opening Australia to Northwest cherries.

Willett, 67, was born into a working-class family in Detroit, Mich., in 1951. He grew up in the inner city and worked from an early age.

On a road trip after his first year at Eastern Michigan University in 1969, Willett heard of fruit harvest in Washington and arrived in

Orondo where he “slept in a ditch near an orchard and waited for the next morning’s opportunity to begin what would become a long career in tree fruit,” Thurlby said.

Willett received his bachelor’s degree in horticulture at Michigan State University and his master’s degree and doctorate in horticulture at Washington State University, under noted sweet cherry innovator Ed Proebsting.

He worked for Oregon State University Extension in Medford and then WSU Extension in Yakima before joining NHC.

Willett previously received the silver pear and distinguished service awards from the Washington State Tree Fruit Association.

New Oregon dairy princess ambassador crowned

By GEOFF PARKS
For the Capital Press

SALEM, Ore. — Emily Henry was chosen the 2019 Oregon dairy princess ambassador at the program’s 60th annual coronation and banquet Saturday night at the Salem Convention Center.

A three-judge panel picked Henry from a field of seven candidates at the Oregon Dairy Women-sponsored Diamond Jubilee Coronation Banquet. The contestants participated in two days of interviews, speeches and preparing commercials promoting dairy products.

The 20-year-old from Scio represents Linn and Benton counties.

She takes over this year’s ODP duties from Stephanie Breazile, who crowned Henry during the ceremony.

Natalie Berry, 17, was ODP’s first alternate. She was crowned by her predecessor, Megan Sprute. Berry was also chosen by the other finalists as Miss Congeniality.

Henry was home-schooled and participated in 4-H and FFA. She is now a student at Linn-Benton Community College majoring in animal science. Directly after the ceremony, she was presented scholarship awards from various businesses, groups and individual sponsors, which last year totaled \$14,000 for Breazile.

She begins a year of statewide travel, mak-



Geoff Parks/For the Capital Press

Newly crowned 2019 Oregon Dairy Princess Ambassador Emily Henry, representing Linn and Benton counties, receives one of her scholarship awards from a dairy industry representative.

ing presentations at fairs, meetings, schools and public events representing Oregon’s dairy industry. The presentations focus on depicting life on a dairy farm and the nutritional benefits of dairy products.

The other finalists included Samantha Arnold of Clackamas County, Belle Erhardt of Columbia County, Donata Doornenbal of Marion County, Allyson Durrer of Tillamook County, Jessica Monroe of Yamhill County and Berry of Washington County.

“All of our candidates were outstanding representatives of the dairy

industry,” said ODP’s State Director Jessica Kliever. “We were overjoyed with the success of the 60th celebration of the ODP program. All of our generous sponsor support, alumni and volunteers helped to create a memorable evening.

“I’m thrilled to be working with Emily and Natalie and we have an amazing year ahead of us.”

The Oregon Dairy Women’s Dairy Princess Ambassador Program was begun in 1959 to advocate for the Oregon dairy industry in collaboration with the Oregon Dairy Farmers Association and the Oregon Dairy Nutrition Council.

Oregon hazelnut farmer named Nut Growers Society Grower of the Year

By GEORGE PLAVERN
Capital Press

CORVALLIS, Ore. — A little perseverance has paid off in a big way for Dennis Glaser at his hazelnut orchards near Tangent, Ore. in the Mid-Willamette Valley.

When Glaser first planted hazelnut trees at Mid Valley Farms in 1981, he said “everyone thought I was crazier than a pet coon.” And why shouldn’t they? Traditionally, the region’s heavy clay soils and high rainfall make it the ideal place for growing grass seed, not filberts.

Over the years, Glaser has worked to diversify crop



Courtesy Oregon Hazelnut Industry

Dennis Glaser, of Tangent, Ore., was named the 2019 Nut Growers Society Grower of the Year during the group’s winter meeting Jan. 17 at Oregon State University.

rotation and break up the monoculture of grass seed on the family farm. Today, he

and his son, Ryan, manage 370 acres of Barcelona and Jefferson hazelnut trees, and are at the forefront of drainage, nutrient, irrigation and mulching practices.

On Jan. 17, the Nut Growers Society — a membership group representing the Oregon Hazelnut Industry — met for its annual winter meeting at Oregon State University in Corvallis, and named Glaser, 72, the Grower of the Year for 2018.

“I appreciate the recognition,” Glaser said in a phone interview with the Capital Press. “That’s always well appreciated.”

Glaser graduated from OSU in 1969 with a degree in agricultural engineering and crop and soil science. He took

over Mid Valley Farms from his father, Frank, in 1972. At the time, they grew mostly grass seed as the combination of soils and moisture made it difficult to mix in rotation crops locally.

By the 1980s, Glaser said the farm was facing tough times with high interest rates and fluctuating income from grass seed markets. Two out of five years, he said, the farm would turn a profit. The other three years, it would either break even or struggle to minimize losses.

Glaser focused on diversifying crops to smooth out the ups and downs. In 1979, he bought 160 acres of new land capable of growing around 50 to 60 bushels per acre of wheat. With the help of a mentor, Wayne Chambers, they incorporated tile drainage in the fields to remove excess water from soil beneath the surface, which bumped the wheat crop up to 100-plus bushels per acre.

Chambers, a premier hazelnut farmer north of Albany, Ore., also helped Glaser with planting the first Barcelona hazelnut trees on the property.

“The biggest thing down here on these heavier, wet soils is drainage,” Glaser said. “That was the big key to that whole evolution ... I was the first one to really start working with that in mind.”

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