

Attorney describes options to get foreign farmworkers

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

YAKIMA, Wash. — While the H-2A-visa agricultural foreign guest-worker program is heavily used in Washington, there are other lesser known means of getting legal foreign workers.

“None of these things is a magic bullet but they are some other potentials,” Tom Roach, a Pasco immigration attorney, told the Washington Growers League annual meeting in Yakima, Feb. 20.

He reviewed nine options but later said they would be of minimal use to Washington growers, but the most promising is Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).

It’s a two-year renewable deferral of deportation with work authorization granted to children of illegal immigrants who came to the U.S. under 15 years of age.



Tom Roach, a Pasco, Wash., immigration attorney, at the Washington Growers League annual meeting, Feb. 20.

While the future of the program is in litigation, some 800,000 recipients can work. The National Council of Agricultural Employers estimates less than 2 percent of them work in agriculture. Roach agreed it’s a small number but said he knows of some who do.

Another avenue is immigrant visas or green cards (permanent residence status). About 1 million green

cards are issued annually with 85 percent based on family. About 5,000 are set aside for low-skilled workers, but his law firm is helping a dairy use it to get work permits, he said. The dairy foreman, who is from Mexico, is doing the recruiting, he said.

Foreign students in U.S. colleges on F-1 visas can get work permits for part-time work while in college

and a permit for up to a year of work after college, Roach said.

People allowed into the country while applying for political asylum can get work permits while they await processing, he said.

Temporary protected status is given to eligible nationals from designated countries affected by armed conflict or natural disasters. It allows people to live and work in the U.S. for limited time but is renewable.

“It can kind of last forever. Trump has decided it will be discontinued Sept. 9 for people from El Salvador, but that’s in the courts so who knows if it will be,” Roach said.

The North American Free Trade Agreement allows people — mostly professionals, but not farmworkers — and goods to move across borders, he said. It requires a letter from a U.S. employer that the applicant submits at the border.

Former Washington governor heads USMCA coalition

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

A group of trade associations, businesses and advocacy groups, headed by Democrat Gary Locke — a former ambassador to China, governor of Washington and U.S. commerce secretary — have launched a new coalition to support passage of the U.S. Mexico Canada Agreement.

“I’m not a supporter of most of the president’s policies but we have to look at this particular agreement,” Locke told Capital Press.

“It sets a higher standard for Mexico and Canada trade and benefits American growers and consumers. So that’s why this is a large bipartisan effort,” Locke said.

The Pass USMCA Coalition is a bipartisan effort advocating swift passage of USMCA by highlighting its unique benefits to America’s workers, consumers, businesses and economy.

Locke is honorary chairman. The coalition was announced Feb. 13. The executive director is Republican Rick Dearborn, former deputy chief of staff to President Donald Trump and who worked in the George W. Bush administration and was chief of staff to Jeff Sessions when he was in the U.S. Senate.

Locke said USMCA is “certainly an improvement” over the North American Free Trade Agreement that it will replace.

“It benefits dairy, poultry and eggs with fewer restrictions in Canada,

and Washington wines will be able to market in British Columbia, where under NAFTA Canada could prohibit them,” he said.

The agreement also requires Mexican workers be paid higher wages when building auto parts, which helps level the playing field and reduces the incentive for the auto industry to move factories to Mexico, Locke said.

He said he will personally lobby members of Congress for passage and noted former

USDA Secretary and Iowa Gov. Tom Vilsack, also a Democrat, supports USMCA.

“We need to look at the agreement. It’s so much better than ripping up NAFTA and walking away, as the president originally proposed,” Locke said.

The agreement is a modern precedent for freer and fairer trade in North America and throughout the world, he said.

“Ratifying it quickly will improve our trading relationships with Canada and Mexico, create more jobs for American workers, and propel international trade into the 21st century,” he said.

Trade with Canada and Mexico supports 14 million U.S. jobs across many sectors.

These workers — and the industries they support — drive billions of dollars in annual U.S. exports. In 2017, the U.S. exported more than \$275 billion in goods to Mexico and nearly \$350 billion in goods to Canada.

Work progresses on celiac-safe wheat

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

A new variety of wheat that would be safe for celiac patients to eat is under development, but researchers say years of testing remain before it could be commercially available.

Sachin Rustgi, an assistant professor of molecular breeding at Clemson University in Clemson, S.C., and a Washington State University adjunct faculty member, foresees at least three to five more years of testing ahead.

The project was begun at WSU, where the initial wheat varieties were developed. A detailed biochemical analysis was done at Clemson, according to a



Capital Press File

A type of wheat that would be safe for celiac sufferers is under development at Washington State University and Clemson University.

WSU press release.

Researchers introduced new DNA into wheat, developing a variety that contains a “gluten-busting”

enzyme, or glutenase, from barley and another from the bacterium *Flavobacterium meningosepticum*. These enzymes break down gluten proteins in the human digestive system.

Since most wheat products are baked at high temperatures, Rustgi’s team is now developing heat-stable variations of the enzymes.

The new genotype is still at the research stage and has not been approved for sale.

Scientists tested gluten extracts from the experimental grain and found that it had far lower levels of the gluten proteins, according to WSU. The enzymes reduced the amount of indigestible gluten by as much as two-thirds.

More than 2 million peo-

ple in the U.S. suffer from celiac disease. The body’s immune system reacts when someone with celiac disease eats gluten — the protein in wheat that gives breads, pasta and cereal their chewy texture. Celiac patients suffer nausea, cramps, malnutrition and other health problems when they eat food that includes gluten.

There is no treatment for celiac disease other than avoiding foods made with wheat or taking an enzyme supplement with every meal.

“I have talked with many (celiac patients) and they have all been willing to try anything that is suitable for them,” Rustgi told the Capital Press. “They wish to have something that is wheat that they can eat.”

Potato contracting legislation advances

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

The Idaho House Agricultural Affairs Committee on Feb. 26 endorsed legislation that would formalize the process grower associations have used for 50-plus years in negotiating annual contracts with processors of fried potato products.

Supporters said House Bill 121 would help keep processors from negotiating directly with individual members of grower associations, as they contend a processor did last spring, striking unfair deals that ultimately impact market-wide pricing.

Opponents said the processor did nothing illegal or in bad faith, and that the legislation is not needed since the longstanding voluntary negotiations between associ-

ations and processors work well overall while preserving free-market opportunities. Moreover, HB 121 is vague and does not impose non-compliance penalties, they said.

The bill establishes an Oct. 31-March 15 negotiating period for grower associations and processors. Negotiations between processors and individual grower members of the association would not be allowed until after the period passes with no agreement in hand. Associations must be nonprofit cooperatives with at least 40 member growers.

The committee briefly considered sending the bill back for revision or amendment — Rep. Jerald Raymond, R-Menan, questioned its lack of oversight and penalties as well as its consequences — but ultimately voted to send it

as-is to the full House with a do-pass recommendation.

“The pricing imbalance in the market is real, and I have never seen it in my 30-year career,” said Dan Hargraves of the Southern Idaho Potato Cooperative. Membership in SIPCO is voluntary. The cooperative represents about half of Idaho growers and impacts the market broadly. Some growers will be at an approximately 50-cent-per hundredweight price disadvantage as a result of negotiating independently, he said.

Negotiations between grower associations and processors have worked well over many years, benefiting the parties while providing a price benchmark for the broader industry including seed potatoes and dehydrated products, Hargraves said.

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