

# House set to reconsider immigration reform

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS  
Capital Press

A bipartisan bill addressing the labor shortage in agriculture through immigration reform was reintroduced in the U.S. House last week by Reps. Zoe Lofgren, D-Calif., and Dan Newhouse, R-Wash.

The Farm Workforce Modernization Act, HR 1537, has the support of 24 Democrats and 20 Republicans.

It would establish a program for agricultural workers in the U.S. to earn legal status and establish a mandatory, nationwide E-Verify system for all agricultural employment with a structured phase-in process.

The bill would also reform the H-2A temporary worker visa program to provide more flexibility for employers, streamline

## MORE DETAILS

A summary of the bill can be found at: <https://bit.ly/30pXj0i>

the process and provide access to year-round workers.

The original version of the bill passed the House in December 2019 on a 260-165 vote and had the support of more than 300 agricultural groups.

Sponsors of the current bill say it was negotiated over several months with input from agricultural stakeholders and labor organizations, and some of those groups are chiming in with statements of support.

Throughout the process of drafting the legislation in the previous Congress, Lofgren and Newhouse met with a wide variety of stakeholders to solicit input

and build support, said Chuck Connor, president of the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives.

“Once the bill is, hopefully, approved by the House, we look forward to working with the Senate to ensure that any final legislation addresses concerns with the FWMA and ensures the future competitiveness of farmers and ranchers,” he said.

The United Fresh Produce Association and its members have pushed for this reform for many years, said Tom Stenzel, president and CEO of the association.

“There remains work to be done to address the industry’s

labor challenges, but this bill is an integral first step towards achieving our ultimate goal,” he said.

The bill is “the culmination of nearly a decade of negotiations between key stakeholders and represents an important first step toward resolving, once and for all, one of the biggest challenges facing American farmers,” said Dave Puglia, president and CEO of Western Growers.

“We recognize that there is more work to be done, but this marks a major step forward,” he said.

The legislation is a necessary and first step in addressing the labor crisis in agriculture, said Jim Bair, president and CEO of U.S. Apple Association.

“The current system causes an unstable situation for not only apple growers, but for all farmers

who depend on immigrant labor to bring Americans healthy and affordable food,” he said.

For decades, National Milk Producers Federation has fought hard for agricultural labor reform, said Jim Mulhern, the federation’s president and CEO.

“This bipartisan bill takes a significant step toward ultimately addressing through legislation the workforce crisis plaguing American agriculture,” he said.

The U.S. pork industry is suffering from a serious labor shortage, negatively impacting farms and processing plants, said Jen Sorensen, president of National Pork Producers Council.

“Unfortunately, the current H-2A visa program is designed for seasonal agriculture, ignoring the needs of U.S. pork producers and other year-round livestock farmers,” she said.

# Cattle groups weigh in on marketing legislation

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS  
Capital Press

A bill introduced on March 2 by Sens. Deb Fischer, R-Neb., and Ron Wyden, D-Ore., aims to restore transparency and accountability to cattle markets.

The Cattle Market Transparency Act would establish regional minimums for negotiated cash trade to enable price discovery and provide cattle producers with more market information.

Concerns over meat-packer concentration, dwindling cash trade and a lack of transparency in cattle marketing have been brewing in the cattle industry for some time.

But huge disparities between boxed beef prices and live cattle prices after a 2019 fire at a Tyson plant in Kansas and during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic brought the simmering to a boil.

The problem is 80% of live fat cattle are sold on a formula contract and only 20% are sold on a cash basis. The cash price sets the base price for formula contracts, and there isn’t enough cash trade for true price discovery.

The bill aligns with American Farm Bureau Federation’s goals and policy, the organization said in a statement.

“America’s ranchers don’t control the prices they are paid for their products and those raising livestock have legitimate questions about pricing,” said Zippy Duvall,



EO Media Group File

Legislation introduced in the U.S. Senate addresses price discovery for cattle.

Farm Bureau president.

When the pandemic hit, meat prices at grocery stores went up while the prices paid to ranchers fell through the floor, he said.

“This legislation will ensure farmers and ranchers have fair access to markets and are fully informed on pricing so they can continue to put food on the table in homes across the country,” he said.

National Cattlemen’s Beef Association supports

a voluntary approach to increase negotiated trade and has put a framework in place to establish benchmarks in different regions of the country.

It opposes mandatory minimums but will seek solutions through USDA or Congress if the voluntary effort fails.

# NW onion prices, shipments mixed

By BRAD CARLSON  
Capital Press

Northwest onion shipment volumes and prices are mixed compared to a year ago, when the first wave of COVID-19 disruptions hit.

Shipments from the southwestern Idaho-southeastern Oregon growing region were up 12.2% to 23,679 for the season to date through March 1, according to the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service. A shipment is 400 cwt.

Shipments from the Columbia Basin of Washington and Oregon were down 3.72% to 24,447.

A 50-pound sack of jumbo yellow Spanish hybrid onions from the Idaho-Oregon region March 1 sold for \$6 to \$7, the same range as a year ago.

Columbia Basin jumbo yellow hybrids sold for \$5 to \$6; a year ago, they were \$5 to \$5.50.

Kay Riley, general manager of Snake River Produce in Nyssa, Ore., near the Idaho border, said prices have been “pretty low” but are improving slightly.

Crop-damaging weather in Texas in mid-February boosted prices, “but we are

in a serious transportation crisis, too,” he said. “We’ve got all kinds of orders and no kinds of trucks. But hopefully with better weather across the country, it will even itself back out.”

National Onion Association Executive Vice President Greg Yielding said more than 20% of the Texas crop was storm-damaged. The state is a big supplier of fresh and sweet onions.

Onion stocks are dropping around the U.S., he said.

“Demand is better, and a lot of that is because there has been more of an opening up of the foodservice sector,” the Colorado-based Yielding said. “And there continues to be good retail sales.”

Foodservice improvement is important in part because it helps re-establish “a home for those larger onions” harder to move at retail, he said. The inland Northwest is a major U.S. producer of large onions.

Shipments of the fall 2020 crop have been above year-earlier levels consistently. Shipping started early, and initial demand exceeded expectations — helped by “a pipeline that was fairly empty” and restaurants offering take-out, he said.



Idaho and Malheur County Onion Growers

The inland Northwest, including the southeastern Oregon-southwestern Idaho growing region, is a major U.S. onion producer.

## OREGON TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING (OTAC)

When: March 18, 2021 -9:00 am  
The meeting will be held virtually and details on how to join will be available <https://tinyurl.com/y55m4hns>

For more information, or to arrange special accommodations for meeting attendees, please contact Julie MacSwain at 503-414-3250 or email to: [Julie.macswain@usda.gov](mailto:Julie.macswain@usda.gov)

## LEGAL

### Request for Proposals Fiscal Year

July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022  
The Oregon Beef Council is Soliciting proposals for

- In the following areas:
- Positive Producer Image
  - Studying Legislation
  - Education related to beef
  - Generic promotion of beef

Any individual or organization may propose projects in any of the categories listed above.

Projects must meet the Beef Council’s mission of enhancing the beef industry’s image of profitability of Oregon’s beef industry. Approved projects must comply with the Beef Promotion and Research Act and O.R.S. 577.

To present a proposal you must complete and submit an Authorization Request Form by March 26, 2021 at 4:00 pm.

Download an Authorization Request Form from [orbeef.org](http://orbeef.org) or by contacting the Oregon Beef Council office  
503-274-2333 or via email at [Julie@orbeef.org](mailto:Julie@orbeef.org). 5233957-1

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