



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Rachel May

Senator Rachel May Urges Federal Representatives to Ensure the H-2A Visa Program Continues

RACHEL MAY March 26, 2020

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| COMMITTEE: **LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION ON RURAL RESOURCES**



Syracuse, NY - Senator Rachel May (D-Onondaga, Madison, Oneida) has delivered a letter to Senator Schumer, Senator Gillibrand, Representatives Katko and Brindisi, and Federal Departments urging them to continue the H-2A guest worker visa program during this uncertain time. New York farmers rely on the H-2A program to ensure enough workforce to maintain food production. New York is a leading agricultural state nationwide, and

agriculture is one of New York's top economic contributors.

Below is the text of the letter.

March 24, 2020

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer Minority Leader, United States Senate 322 Hart Senate Office Building Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Schumer,

We write to you today to express our concerns regarding the impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) on the H-2A agricultural guest worker program and ultimately, New York's agricultural industry. New York is a leading agricultural state due to its production of a range of commodities, including dairy, apples, maple syrup, and wine. Producers have increasingly relied on the H-2A visa program in response to the shortage of available workers. A reliable work force is essential to the success and sustainability of the agricultural industry.

Due to the unpredictable spread of COVID-19, the agricultural industry, along with so many others, is threatened. On March 18, 2020, it was announced that visa services would be suspended at Mexican Consulates and Embassies and until further notice. Wider implications were also announced for H-2A workers originating from other countries, including Jamaica, South Africa, and Guatemala. These actions will undoubtedly affect H-2A workers who are expected to start arriving in the United States any day now. This policy could have a detrimental impact on not only New York's agricultural industry, but that of every state as producers already face low commodity prices and unpredictable markets. While we are grateful that the State Department has waived the interview requirement for returning H-2A workers, it is critical that new H-2A applicants also have a means to be interviewed and receive approval to ensure the flow of a necessary workforce.

We request that the Department of Labor (DOL) and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) ensure that all H-2A visa applications are reviewed and acted upon in a timely manner to ensure the flow of approved H-2A workers into the U.S. We also request that the Administration allow these H-2A workers, who have been evaluated and do not pose a health risk, are able to travel into the U.S. and reach their place of employment. It is imperative that no borders, where there have not been widespread cases of COVID-19, be completely shut down to allow the entry of these essential workers.

It is essential that the U.S. maintain its level of high-quality food production to ensure food security for the nation. It is our hope that you will see the merit in these actions and advocate with all the force of your office to have the federal government take appropriate steps.

Sincerely,

Rachel May

Senator, 53rd District

Chair, Legislative Commission on Rural Resources

Jen Metzger

Senator, 42nd District

Chair, Committee on Agriculture

cc: David Fisher, President, New York Farm Bureau

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