



## Senators Feinstein and Craig Call for Vote on AgJOBS Bill

*-Agriculture Worker Shortage Crippling Farmers Across the Country*

September 22, 2006

**Washington, DC** – U.S. Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and Larry Craig (R-Idaho) today urged the Senate Leadership to address the growing agriculture worker shortage by bringing the AgJOBS bill before the Senate for a vote.

The AgJOBS bill would establish a pilot earned adjustment program for agriculture workers, which would help to ease the severe worker shortage being experienced by frustrated farmers across the country.

Following is the text of the letters sent today to Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) and Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.):

September 22, 2006

Dear Leaders:

As you know, the AgJOBS legislation passed by the Senate would provide real relief for America's farmers, hard hit by worker shortages. Yet this relief languishes in Congress, while the crisis being faced by farmers across this country has only been exacerbated. Just this morning, a *New York Times* front page story proclaimed "Pickers Are Few, and Growers Blame Congress." (copy attached) We agree with their sentiment.

Earlier this week, we went to the floor to highlight the desperate need for these workers. Now there is an opportunity to pass AgJOBS and finally, get it signed into law. As you know, the border fence legislation is on the floor and we have each filed an amendment to add AgJOBS.

**We urge you to give us the opportunity to have AgJOBS voted on and send it to the House so it can be enacted into law immediately.**

There is simply no reason AgJOBS has not been enacted, and no reason it could not be passed now. Farmers across this country have every reason to be angry and frustrated. The *New*

*York Times* article is just one of dozens that have been written this summer highlighting the plight our farmers are facing.

California is the single largest agriculture state in the nation with over \$34 billion in annual revenue and approximately 76,500 farms. And this year, growers in California are reporting that their harvesting crews are 10 to 20 percent of what they were previously. As the *Times* reported, "California farms employ at least 450,000 people at the peak of the harvest, with farm workers progressing from one crop to the next, stringing together as much as seven months of work. Growers estimate the state fell short this harvest season by 70,000 workers." The impact is devastating "fields go untended, and acres have to be torn up because there is no one to harvest them." (*San Jose Mercury News* 8/9/06)

Agricultural labor shortages affect not just California; in fact, they are impacting farms across the country, including harvesting of citrus in Florida, apples in New Hampshire, strawberries in Washington, and cherries in Oregon. In Wyoming, it has been reported that the labor shortage played a central role in the imminent closure of the \$8 million Wind River Mushroom farm. The Idaho Department of Commerce and Labor reports that the number of farm workers in Idaho is down by 18 percent, and the Potato Growers of Idaho believes "appropriate legislation, such as AgJOBS, is needed to keep the industry growing." (PGI news release, 9/12/06)

Most shocking, the American Farm Bureau has found "that if Congress enacts legislation that deals only with border security and enforcement, the impact on fruit and vegetable farmers nationwide would be between \$5 billion and \$9 billion annually. Net farm income in the rest of the agricultural sectors would decline between \$1.5 billion and \$5 billion a year."

The time is long overdue to help American farmers get the labor they need. The opportunity is before us, and we must not turn our backs on this real problem that could be fixed with the enactment of the AgJOBS legislation.

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