

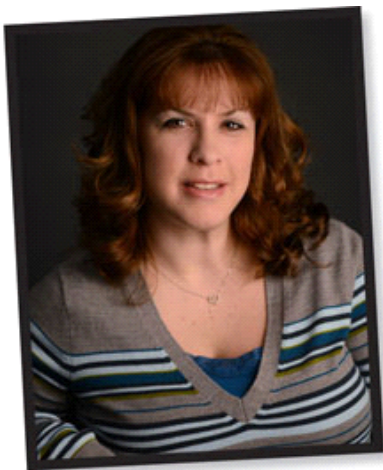
GROWERTALKS

Inside Look

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Helping Yourself

Jennifer Zurko



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When I was at Congressional Action Days in March, the Society of American Florists (SAF) did a great job of packing the two days of the event with interesting speakers and a trip to the White House.

On the first day, two gentlemen from Cornerstone Government Affairs (they help SAF with its lobbying efforts) sat down for a point/counterpoint discussion. Jim Richards represented the Republican side and Mike Smith had the side of the Democrats.

The first topic they discussed was immigration reform. Right away, Jim said that talk of passing any type of comprehensive legislation was “probably dead.” If anything, most Republicans would be pushing for a new H-2C guestworker program, which would essentially replace H-2A. However, unlike A, C would carry a cap and make E-verify mandatory. (With opposition from

almost the entire agriculture and floriculture sector—and because the sponsor of the bill, Senator Bob Goodlatte (R-VA), is retiring at the end of this year—it’ll probably die on the Senate floor.)

Mike referred to polls that show most Americans support comprehensive immigration reform and the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, and said Democrats were ready to sign the last proposal, which also included protection for DACA recipients, but it failed to pass through the Senate.

Jim said a lot of Republicans support immigration reform, but it depends on where their districts are located—many are from areas of the country where there aren’t a lot of foreign-born constituents.

So we all came away with that familiar feeling of frustration and helplessness. Unfortunately, we’re getting used to it.

In the meantime, many of you are trying to get in front of the labor shortage by investigating other options. Some growers have told me that they’re applying for H-2A certification for the first time; they can no longer cross their fingers, hoping people will walk into the greenhouse looking for a job. It’s now last-resort time.

One of those first-timers suggested we include an article that covers the basics of H-2A. He went into the process blind and said he would have liked a little background before jumping in head first. (Luckily, he’s an AmericanHort member, so he had access to knowledgeable legal counsel that helped.) So we’ve come up with a brief “study guide” on the H-2A program that includes general info, some background on the program and tips from your peers who’ve been using it for years.

Another way to save on labor (money and time) is to figure out where the bottlenecks are holding up things in your greenhouse. It's an important step to improve upon your productivity and efficiency. Gary Cortés from FlowVision gives us some examples.

You also may save some money if you change the type of business category you file under for your taxes. With the new tax bill, companies filing as “pass-through business entities” may be facing a higher tax rate.

In the 15 years since I was adopted into this industry, I've learned so many things. But one that's at the top of the list is how resourceful and adaptable many of you are when it comes to saving money and improving your business to ensure its long-term success—especially when some aspects are out of your control. You've shown me that it's nice to have help, but sometimes you have to help yourself.