

GROWERTALKS

JZ on D.C.

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House Ag Labor Bill Passes the House

Jennifer Zurko

On Wednesday, December 11, the bipartisan Farm Workforce Modernization Act (H.R. 5038) passed the House in a bipartisan vote of 260-165. This is the first time in over 30 years that the House has passed significant farm labor legislation.

In a statement, AmericanHort's Senior VP of Government Relations Craig Regelbrugge said: "For years, our growers have struggled with a broken immigration and agricultural visa system that harms their ability to succeed and sustain their farms and businesses in today's marketplace. In view of the huge contributions the horticulture industry makes to local and national economies, action here couldn't be more welcome. We extend our deepest appreciation to the House lawmakers who saw through the politics and remained committed to addressing this problem in earnest."

Many companies in the agriculture and floriculture sector, including AmericanHort, worked tirelessly to encourage their representatives to support the bill—some right up to within 24 hours of when it was going on the floor for a vote. The next step is to start garnering support in the Republican-controlled Senate, which many believe will be a difficult road. But Craig remains optimistic that we can "find a way to thread the Senate needle."

"We encourage the Senate to quickly take up this issue and work on a bipartisan basis to advance agricultural labor reform legislation in that chamber," said Craig. "Growers and producers across the nation want to keep farming labor-intensive crops here in America and labor solutions are urgently needed."



Building Relationships with Your Local Reps

Both AmericanHort and SAF always hammer home the importance of reaching out to your government representatives to tell them to support legislation that's important to your business and even invite them to tour your operation. Mike and Rachel Gooder of PlantPeddler in Cresco, Iowa, have had a year of their local reps paying them a visit.

Pictured: Congresswoman Abby Finkenauer (center) paid a visit to PlantPeddler in early 2019.

Early last year, Congresswoman Abby Finkenauer (D-IA) took a tour through their facility and this past November,

the Gooders hosted Iowa Lieutenant Governor Adam Gregg to see their poinsettia crop.

AmericanHort's Craig Regelbrugge said, "Hosting a facility tour is one of the most effective ways to establish a productive relationship with your policymakers and it doesn't need to be a heavy lift—just some prior planning and a little patience."

If you need some tips on planning a successful visit from your representatives, contact AmericanHort at education@americanhort.org.



Michigan Senator Pushes for Farm Bill Fixes

Important adjustments to the Farm Bill are now in the works, thanks in large part to a Midwest senator recently honored for her support of the floral industry.

SAF CEO Kate Penn met recently with Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-Michigan), who in early November was inducted into the Michigan Floral Foundation Hall of Fame.

Pictured: Senator Debbie Stabenow, center, with (left to right) SAF CEO Kate Penn; Nancy Hooper and Tim Galea of Norton's Flowers & Gifts; and Bob Patterson of

Patterson's Flowers & Gifts.

Stabenow was among the lawmakers who co-sponsored the bipartisan Farm Bill and Kate took the opportunity to remind the senator of technical fixes to the bill that would improve the floral industry's ability to leverage research dollars for specialty crops improvements. Within two hours of that conversation, Stabenow and her staff had fast-tracked those fixes, flagging them as a high priority for future congressional attention.

The quick turnaround is a testament to the floral industry's importance to the U.S. economy and to the common-sense solutions SAF advances, Kate said.

"These meetings with lawmakers are an important part of SAF's strategy to advocate in Washington for the floral industry and to promote meaningful change and find solutions for the growth-minded floral professionals that we serve," she added.

—Mary Westbrook, Editor-in-Chief of SAF's publication *Floral Management*

Successful H-2B "Day of Action"

AmericanHort teamed up with the National Association of Landscape Professionals, the Seasonal Employment Alliance and the H-2B Workforce Coalition to host a "day of action" on November 13. Over 150 H-2B users from across the country, most from the landscape industry, came to Washington to advocate for H-2B cap relief to be included in any final spending bill passed by Congress.

AmericanHort and state partner associations sent a grassroots appeal as well, which led to several hundred additional emails and calls to Congressional offices.

During Hill meetings and via grassroots messages, our members asked that their elected officials sign onto a letter to Congressional leaders calling for cap relief to be included in a final spending bill. Senators King (I-ME) and Rounds (R-SD), and Reps. Bergman (R-MI) and Keating (D-MA) are leading these letters. Our preliminary intelligence shows that our Hill outreach resulted in a large bipartisan group of lawmakers signing onto these letters, with 30 signatories in the Senate and 100 in the House.

As with past years, “must do” appropriations bills offer the best opportunity to pass temporary H-2B cap relief, while we work toward a permanent solution to the H-2B labor crisis. In November, House and Senate leaders agreed to a temporary spending bill to fund the federal government through December 20, while lawmakers work to reach an agreement on a host of fiscal 2020 spending bills.

We will keep you updated on the status of efforts to pass FY 2020 cap relief quickly. We’re also continuing to work to negotiate a permanent H-2B relief bill.

—Craig Regelbrugge, VP of Government Relations & Research, AmericanHort



Registration is open for Congressional Action Days!

For the 40th year, SAF will be hosting its annual Congressional Action Days where attendees meet with their representatives, hear speakers from around Washington and network with their peers. Go to safnow.org to register and get more information on the itinerary and speaker lineup. **GT**