GROWERTALKS

JZ on D.C.

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Jennifer Zurko

AmericanHort Submits H-2A Comments Highlighting Grower Impacts
On December 1, AmericanHort submitted comments to the Federal Register on Department of Labor's Interim Final Rule (IFR) governing the H-2A program. The IFR addresses proposed changes to wage methodology, worker protections and employer obligations. The comments underscore the significant impacts these changes could have on greenhouse, nursery and floriculture operations and commended the Administration for engaging with growers on the high costs and regulatory burdens associated with the Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR) and H-2A.

GO HERE to read the letter.
—*Source: AmericanHort*

Update on H-2A & H-2B Visa Processing
Thanks to the work of AmericanHort and advocacy partners, the Office of Foreign Labor Certification (OFLC) will resume processing prevailing wage determinations and labor certification applications. Office of Immigration Policy staff may also be recalled on an intermittent basis to support excepted or exempt immigration-related activities.

The work performed by these offices precedes the visa admission and issuance work performed by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of State, respectively, as required by the Immigration and Nationality Act and DHS regulations. The work of OFLC is required to support these exempt activities at DHS and State, which remain funded by fee revenues authorized by Congress and paid by employers. This is encouraging news and AmericanHort will continue to monitor this situation.
—*Matt Mika, AmericanHort*

Over 100 Lawmakers Call to Protect USMCA's Ag Benefits
In November, more than 100 House bipartisan members sent a letter to U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer underscoring the importance of the U.S.–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA) ahead of next year's joint review.

Led by Reps. Adrian Smith (R-NE-03), Jimmy Panetta (D-CA-19), Dusty Johnson (R-SD-At-Large) and Jim Costa (D-CA-21), the lawmakers highlighted USMCA's strong economic record, noting that U.S. agricultural exports to Mexico and Canada have increased by $10.7 billion and $7.6 billion, respectively, since the agreement entered into force. The letter urges the administration to protect these gains, avoid changes that could disrupt cross-border trade and fully enforce existing obligations.

For the horticulture industry specifically, USMCA remains foundational, ensuring duty-free movement of critical

inputs and plant material across North America and supporting a stable, predictable supply chain for growers. With the upcoming review set to determine whether the agreement is extended and whether any modifications are proposed, AmericanHort will continue championing the essential role USMCA plays in keeping our industry competitive and resilient.

In support of the letter, AmericanHort President & CEO Ken Fisher stated, “The USMCA has played a vital role in strengthening North American horticulture by ensuring that essential inputs move freely across our borders and giving growers the predictability they need to operate with confidence. As the agreement enters its formal review, it is critical that policymakers maintain the duty-free, integrated framework that has allowed the horticulture sector to thrive. Protecting these benefits is key to preserving the stability, affordability and economic vitality that USMCA provides to our industry.”
AmericanHort will continue engaging with Congress and the administration throughout the review to ensure horticulture’s interests remain front and center.
— Kamron Newberry & Matt Mika, AmericanHort

Farm Bill Extension Included in Shutdown Deal
As part of the Senate’s agreement to reopen the government this past November, lawmakers included an extension of several remaining provisions of the 2018 Farm Bill until September 30, 2026. This move ensures the continued operation of key agricultural support and conservation programs that might otherwise have lapsed, giving Congress more time to negotiate a full reauthorization.

While the extension provides short-term certainty for farmers and rural stakeholders, it also delays broader policy updates that many in agriculture have been seeking. The next year will be critical for shaping what ultimately becomes the next comprehensive Farm Bill.
—Rachel Pick, AmericanHort

Senate Election Watch
With just under one year until the 2026 midterm elections, the battle for Senate control is taking shape around a handful of high-stakes races. Democrats must gain four seats to retake the majority, while Republicans are defending narrow margins and several competitive states.
The most vulnerable senators are Democrat senators Jon Ossoff (D-GA), Edward J. Markey (D-MA) and Republican senators Susan Collins (R-ME), John Cornyn (R-TX), Bill Cassidy (R-LA) and Jon Husted (R-OH).

Retirements in Michigan, New Hampshire, Minnesota, North Carolina and Iowa have also created open-seat contests that could tip the balance of power heading into Election Day 2026.
—Rachel Pick, AmericanHort

News, views, commentary and event coverage about the policies and legislation that directly affect our industry. Share your thoughts, opinions and news with me: jzurko@ballpublishing.com.