

GROWERTALKS

JZ on D.C.

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Chairman Thompson Introduces the Securing Agriculture's Workforce Act

Jennifer Zurko

House Agriculture Committee Chairman G.T. Thompson (R-PA-15) is preparing to introduce H.R. 9535, the Securing Agriculture's Workforce Act (SAWA), his long-anticipated ag labor reform bill. This bipartisan bill would deliver meaningful, long-overdue reforms to the program that horticulture and specialty crop businesses rely on to meet workforce needs.

SAWA addresses specific challenges by expanding program access for all specialty crop operations, establishing a fair and stable wage methodology, and streamlining the administrative process to reduce costly delays. It would also modernize key aspects of the H-2A program, including reforms to the AEWR determination process, improvements to H-2A hiring, expanding to landscapers, and help simplify use for greenhouse operations.

AmericanHort has worked closely with Chairman Thompson's office and the Agriculture Workforce Coalition throughout the bill's development and strongly supports it.

"AmericanHort applauds Chairman Thompson for his leadership and foresight in advancing meaningful H-2A reform," said Matt Mika, VP of Advocacy & Government Affairs for AmericanHort. "The Securing Agriculture's Workforce Act recognizes the labor realities facing the horticulture industry, while taking important steps to streamline the program, improve workforce flexibility, and provide greater certainty for employers and workers alike.

"This legislation is the result of years of bipartisan work led by Chairman Thompson, the House Agriculture Committee and committee staff who stepped forward to tackle a long-standing challenge that many were unwilling to take on. We look forward to continuing our work with congressional leaders, staff and industry partners to advance reforms that strengthen the competitiveness of U.S. horticulture, support green industry businesses and ensure a stable, reliable workforce for the future."

As of press time, the next step was to get the bill into the House Agriculture Committee for consideration. Stay tuned for updates. **GT**

—JZ

AmericanHort Pushes for Horticulture Exemptions

In July, AmericanHort submitted comments to U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) Jamieson Greer on the proposed Section 301 action related to forced labor import enforcement.

According to Section 301(c) of the Trade Act, the Trade Representative is authorized to take certain actions that include imposing “duties or other import restrictions” on the goods of a foreign country if he finds the economies in these countries have imposed forced labor imports.

On March 12, 2026, USTR launched this investigation to look at whether certain countries have failed to effectively prohibit imports made with forced labor. USTR has now moved into the proposed action phase, which includes potential additional duties of 10% or 12.5%, depending on the country, unless specific products are excluded through Annex A. Countries under the order include: Canada, Ecuador, the European Union, Indonesia, Mexico and Pakistan. Economies that have undertaken commitments on trade regarding forced labor imports include: Argentina, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Indonesia, Malaysia and Taiwan.

Comments were due July 6 and hearings were scheduled to take place that week. As of press time, AmericanHort expected USTR to issue a final determination before the expiration of Section 122 tariffs at the end of July.

AmericanHort focused its filing on making sure key horticultural inputs are added to Annex A, the exemption list, so they aren't subject to the proposed additional tariffs. This includes live plants, unrooted and rooted cuttings, tissue culture plantlets, bulbs, seeds for sowing, coconut coir, jute burlap, and sisal twine. They also urged USTR to retain the existing Annex A exemption for peat moss.

Kamron Newberry, regulatory and trade policy coordinator for AmericanHort, said in an email: “Our goal is to ensure that USTR’s final action does not unintentionally increase costs or disrupt the supply chain for U.S. growers who rely on these inputs to produce plants domestically. We will continue engaging with USTR as the agency moves toward a final determination.” **GT**

—JZ

Sonderling Nominated to be Labor Secretary

On June 29, President Trump nominated Keith Sonderling, the current Acting U.S. Secretary of Labor, to fill the position permanently. Mr. Sonderling was confirmed as the Deputy Secretary of Labor in March 2025 and has served as Acting Secretary since former Secretary Lori Chavez-DeRemer resigned in April 2026.

AmericanHort has worked with Mr. Sonderling in the past and, along with the Agriculture Workforce Coalition, met with him at the end of June to thank him for his work on the H-2A rule and his team's work on H.R. 9535. **GT**

— Laurie Flanagan, DCLRS

AmericanHort Announces Additions to Advocacy Committee

Tom Demaline (Willoway Nurseries in Ohio) and Chris Robinson (Robinson Nursery in Oregon) were selected from a competitive pool of nearly 20 applicants to fill the AmericanHort Advocacy Committee's two available seats."

Also new this year, the Advocacy Committee is adding a position with a “Lighthouse member.” Jeff Stone, Executive Director for the Oregon Association of Nurseries, was selected to fill that role, and provide state and local input to the group.

Advocacy Committee members serve a three-year term, with applications accepted annually in the spring. **GT**

—Matt Mika, AmericanHort

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