

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

5/31/2017

A Seat at the Table

Chris Beytes

Fourteen members of the agricultural community—including, importantly, one of our own, Tom Demaline of Willoway Nurseries in Avon, Ohio (second from left)—brief President Trump on issues of concern during a “Farmers Roundtable” April 25 at the White House. New Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue, who had been sworn in early that day, is seated between Tom and the president.



The meeting coincided with President Trump signing an Executive Order establishing an Interagency Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity, the mission of which is to “promote economic development and revitalization, job growth, infrastructure, innovation and quality of life issues for rural America.”

How did Tom get the call?

“They wanted a broad range of agriculture there ... They also wanted people that had experience with the guest-worker program, so that’s how I got the nod,” he said in a phone interview with GrowerTalks a couple of days after the meeting.

Key talking points during the hour-long meeting included labor and need for an effective guest-worker program, plus regulation, foreign trade and rural infrastructure. Tom, with 18 years of experience hiring guest workers, led the discussion on that topic. What was the president’s response?

“He understands the fact that agriculture needs labor to operate,” Tom replied. “He heard what we had to say, he understood the guest-worker program and some of the issues surrounding that ... He understands the need for supporting agricultural labor and fixing the problems that are out there ... He instructed Secretary Purdue to look into this thing and come up with solutions.”

However, Tom added that the meeting was only laying the groundwork. Agriculture—including greenhouse and nursery—needs to “carry the ball,” he says.

“It’s not going to happen for us just because we had a meeting ... We’ve got to engage our associations, our relationships with our elected officials and make this happen.” **GT**