

New York Farm Bureau supports agricultural labor program

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today **U.S. Representatives Richard Hanna** (NY-24) and **Kathy Hochul**

(NY-26) introduced a bill to help Northeast dairy farms hire legal workers, which would allow for more production of local food rather than imported food, and keep farms in business to support Upstate's overall economy.

Hanna and Hochul introduced **H.R. 3024**, the **Access to Agricultural Labor Act of 2011**, to help farmers secure a reliable and legal workforce.

- The bill would allow foreign dairy workers to temporarily come to the United States to perform agricultural labor and services under the H-2A visa program.
- Under the program, dairy workers would be able to work in the United States for extendable periods of three years.

The H-2A program allows foreign workers to enter the U.S. for seasonal or temporary agriculture work. The program was instituted to meet a need for temporary agricultural labor without adding permanent residents to the population. Currently, dairy workers are unable to participate in the H-2A program because dairy is a year-round industry, but the need for more labor is real and urgent in Upstate New York.

During the past 15 years in the Northeast, farmers have reported difficulties hiring native-born local workers. Even during the recession, farm businesses have still been unable to hire and retain local workers.

“Ever since I came into office, I've heard from our dairy farmers about the labor crisis facing their industry. If we want to continue to have a safe and reliable food supply produced in Upstate New York, then this program will be incredibly helpful for dairy farmers,” **Congressman Hanna said**

“Allowing dairy farmers access to legal and stable workforce through the H-2A visa program will keep our farms running, and it means agriculture-related businesses will continue to bolster our economy.”

“The viability of the dairy farm industry is critical to the long-term sustainability of Western New York’s economy,” **Congresswoman Hochul said**. “We need to do all we can to support these family farmers, which is why it is unfair to exclude dairy farmers from the H-2A visa program. They face many of the same labor shortage issues that other sectors of the agriculture community face, which is why Rep. Hanna and I are working to ensure they have the same resources available to get their jobs done.”

Dean E. Norton, president of New York Farm Bureau said this issue has been a high priority for several years and the three-year renewable visa would serve the dairy industry well.

“The dairy industry is the largest sector of farming in New York and is very important to the underlying agricultural services that are available throughout the state for all types of farming,” **Norton said**

. “However, because dairy requires a year-round workforce it has not been eligible for the H-2A program. While H-2A has many problems and inadequacies that will make it difficult to use, it is the only legal way for farmers to secure foreign labor at this time when local labor is not available.”

Among the benefits this bill will bring to Upstate New York farm business:

- It will allow for more jobs to be created and maintained.
- More food will continue to be produced locally rather than imported.
- Upstate farms will continue to be working farms and not vacant farm land.
- Farms have a ripple effect on the economy and benefit many businesses and industries around them.

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