



AGRICULTURAL CRISIS: HOW MASS DEPORTATIONS HURT AMERICA

[Agriculture \(/full-blog/category/Agriculture\)](#)

BY: COLTON L. ADAMS

The 2016 U.S. Presidential Election brought immigration to the forefront of American politics. Of the policies that then-candidate Donald Trump vigorously campaigned on, one that became particularly controversial was his desire to deport millions of undocumented immigrants living in the United States illegally.^[i] This, along with his plan to build a border wall, served as the cornerstone of his “law-and-order” campaign.^[ii] In recent months, however, President Trump has appeared to soften some of his immigration stances, while at the same time, reaffirming his commitment to others.^[iii] Yet despite this, his plan for millions of undocumented workers remains unclear at best.

As the fate of millions continues to loom, the President has fought to fulfill many of his campaign promises: ramping up immigration arrests,^[iv] increasing deportation orders,^[v] and introducing legislation to limit work-visas and legal immigration.^[vi] However, he has yet to make a broad policy determination for the majority of non-criminal, unauthorized workers. While some in Washington have rejected the idea of mass deportation, the President has continued to defer his decision for undocumented immigrants until after the border is secured.^[vii] Should the President continue this trend of fulfilling campaign promises by implementing a mass-deportation styled immigration crackdown, it would surely spell disaster. Aside from any moral or practicability objections to the President’s immigration goals (there are many), one issue that should raise concerns across ideological-lines, is the impact that mass deportations would have on the domestic agricultural economy of the United States.

Although the exact number is not known, most researchers estimate that over half of farm laborers in the United States are unauthorized, or lack the necessary documentation to work legally.^[viii] According to the American Farm Bureau Federation (“AFBF”), this is for a variety of reasons. For example, few American workers are willing to work as seasonal farm laborers, which has caused a labor shortage in the agriculture industry.^[ix] In addition to this, workers entering the current H-2A visa program, the program that allows foreign workers to fill seasonal agriculture jobs,^[x] face a process that is both long and overly complex.^[xi] By some estimates, the bloated bureaucracy of the H-2A application process has resulted in workers arriving an average of 22 days after the labor is needed, and it provides less than 4% of the total labor needed by employers.^[xii] Subsequently, this

bureaucratic-induced labor shortage has caused nearly \$1.3 billion of unrealized farm income.[xiii] Faced with labor shortages, delays, unpredictability, and crop-waste, many growers have been forced to look elsewhere for farm laborers.[xiv],[xv]



http://www.slate.com/content/dam/slate/articles/life/culturebox/2014/05/140519_CBOX_ImmigrantStates.jpg.CROP:original-original.jpg

While the current economic position of U.S. agriculture may sound grim, it has been largely kept afloat due to the influx of unauthorized migrant workers. According to AFBF, an enforcement-only immigration policy like mass deportation could cause agricultural output to drop by nearly \$60 billion.[xvi] In economic terms, as the supply of unauthorized labor decreases, there is a relative decrease in production as a result.[xvii] This decline in agricultural output would not only limit the supply of domestic fruits, vegetables, and livestock available to American consumers, but it could also cause food prices to increase an average of 5-6%.[xviii]

Agricultural industries like dairy farms would be hit especially hard by some of the President's proposed-immigration policies. According to the National Milk Producers Federation ("NMPF"), eliminating immigrant labor would decrease milk production by 29.5 billion pounds.[xix] This fall in output would not only impact the lives of migrant workers, but it would also impact American farmers and consumers. Specifically, NMPF estimates that nearly 4,532 dairy farms would be forced out of the market, and the resulting supply shortage could cause milk retail prices to increase by 61%.[xx]

Though immigration policies like limiting work visas, or mass-deportations, would substantially impact the average consumer and many farm employers, many proponents say that it would allow wages for American laborers to increase. Upon unveiling President Trump's plan to limit legal immigration, White House officials stated that their legislation would "raise wages for American workers." [xxi] Admittedly, most researchers and economists agree. As a result of labor shortages in U.S. agriculture, wages for farm laborers have risen nearly 36% over the last 10 years.[xxii] Economically-speaking, decreases in the supply of labor tend to put upward pressure on wages. Thus, by decreasing the number of unauthorized laborers, or limiting the supply of labor, there would be significant wage increases for authorized laborers.[xxiii]

Despite potential wage increases for authorized laborers, the net result of increased immigration restrictions and mass-deportation would be devastating to farmers and consumers across the United States. Surprisingly to some, labor shortages on American farms are not new to the Trump-era. The addition of bloated-bureaucratic procedures for work visas, and increased deportations during the Bush and Obama administrations have affected U.S. agriculture for over a decade.[xxiv] While the U.S. immigration system needs major reforms, further-limiting the supply of labor by increased restrictions, or mass-deportations are not the answer. Any future immigration reform policies, whether comprehensive or piece-meal, must take the unauthorized workers' impact on U.S. agricultural output into consideration. Then, and only then, will we prevent an agricultural crisis.

- [i] Scott Pelley, *Trump Gets Down to Business on 60 Minutes*, CBS (Sept. 27, 2015), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/donald-trump-60-minutes-scott-pelley/>.
- [ii] Brendan Morrow, *Full Transcript of Donald Trump Law & Order Speech*, Heavy (Aug. 16, 2016), <http://heavy.com/news/2016/08/read-full-transcript-donald-trump-transcript-law-and-order-speech-west-bend-wisconsin/>.
- [iii] See Exec. Order No. 13767, 82 Fed. Reg. 8793 (Jan. 25, 2017) (Within the first few days of his presidency, President Trump issued order the creation of a border wall, and to “repatriate illegal aliens swiftly, consistently, and humanely”); See also Tal Kopan, *Trump Ends DACA But Gives Congress Window to Save It*, CNN (Sept. 5, 2017), <http://www.cnn.com/2017/09/05/politics/daca-trump-congress/index.html> (Upon rescinding President Obama’s Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy (DACA), President Trump encouraged Congress to pass a bill in order to protect DACA recipients, while also reaffirming his “compassion” on the issue).
- [iv] Maya Rhodan, *Arrests of Undocumented Immigrants Went Up During President Trump First 100 Days*, Time (Apr. 28, 2017), <http://time.com/4759713/trump-100-days-arrests-undocumented-immigrants/>.
- [v] William Lajeunesse, *Deportation Orders Jump 31 Percent Under President Trump*, Fox News (Aug. 9, 2017), <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2017/08/09/deportation-orders-jump-31-percent-under-president-trump.html>.
- [vi] Brian Naylor, *Trump Unveils Legislation Limiting Legal Immigration*, NPR (Aug. 2, 2017), <http://www.npr.org/2017/08/02/541104795/trump-to-unveil-legislation-limiting-legal-immigration>.
- [vii] Lesley Stahl, *President-Elect Trump Speaks to a Divided Country*, CBS (Nov. 13, 2016), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/60-minutes-donald-trump-family-melania-ivanka-lesley-stahl/>.
- [viii] See Jeffrey S. Passel, *Size of U.S. Unauthorized Immigrant Workforce Stable After the Great Recession*, Pew Research (Nov. 3, 2016), <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2016/11/03/occupations-of-unauthorized-immigrant-workers/> (estimates unauthorized farm labor accounts for 26% of total farm labor); See also Thomas Hertz and Steven Zahniser, *Immigration and the Rural Workforce*, USDA, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/newsroom/trending-topics/immigration-and-the-rural-workforce/> (last updated Sept. 20, 2017) (estimates unauthorized farm labor accounts for 50-70% of total farm labor).
- [ix] *Despite Economy, Americans Don’t Want Farm Work*, CBS (Sept. 27, 2010, 6:04 PM), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/despite-economy-americans-dont-want-farm-work/>; See also Michael Frank, *Can America’s Farms Survive the Threat of Deportations?*, The Atlantic (Jun. 6, 2017), <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/06/can-americas-farms-survive-the-threat-of-deportations/529008/>.
- [x] United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, *H-2A Temporary Agricultural Workers*, <https://www.uscis.gov/working-united-states/temporary-workers/h-2a-temporary-agricultural-workers> (last visited Sept. 27, 2017).
- [xi] AFBE, *Economic Impact of Immigration*, <https://www.fb.org/issues/immigration-reform/agriculture-labor-reform/economic-impact-of-immigration> (last visited Sept. 27, 2017); See also NCAE, *Why Domestic Agriculture Needs New, Workable Farm Labor Alternatives Now*, <https://ncaonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/ALRP-Brochure.pdf> (last visited Sept. 28, 2017).
- [xii] *Id.*
- [xiii] *Id.*
- [xiv] In fact, a survey in by the National Council of Agricultural Employers found that only 14% of employers were “very satisfied” or “completely satisfied” with the H-2A program. The same survey also found that about 42% of growers stopped relying on the program in 2011 due to the administrative burden and costliness. See NCAE, *supra* note xi.

[xv] These are only some of the many circumstances responsible for the influx of undocumented workers into the United States agricultural industry. This of course, does not even begin to identify some of the big picture reasons driving immigration such as economic crises in neighboring countries, wars, labor surpluses, etc. Additionally, labor shortages in the United States have also been impacted by the negative net immigration rates since 2009.

[xvi] AFBF, *supra* note xi.

[xvii] Steven Zahniser, *Immigration Policy and Its Possible Effects on U.S. Agriculture*, USDA (June 5, 2012), <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2012/june/immigration-policy/>.

[xviii] AFBF, *supra* note xvi.

[xix] NMPF, *The Economic Impacts of Immigration on U.S. Dairy Farms* (June 2009), <http://www.nmpf.org/files/file/NMPF%20Immigration%20Survey%20Web.pdf>.

[xx] *Id.*

[xxi] Naylor, *supra* note vi.

[xxii] Alan Bjerga and Patricia Laya, *Trump's Deportation Policy Stands to Drive Up Farm Wages*, Bloomberg (Feb. 24, 2017), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-02-24/farm-wages-to-show-real-time-impact-of-trump-deportation-policy>.

[xxiii] Zahinser, *supra* note xvii.

[xxiv] See Muzaffar Chisti, *The Obama Record on Deportations: Deporter in Chief or Not?*, Migration Policy Institute (Jan. 26, 2017), <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/obama-record-deportations-deporter-chief-or-not>; See also Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, *U.S. Immigrant Deportations Fall to Lowest Level Since 2007*, Pew Research Center (Dec. 16, 2016), <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/12/16/u-s-immigrant-deportations-fall-to-lowest-level-since-2007/>.

Tagged: Agriculture (/full-blog/tag/Agriculture), Economics (/full-blog/tag/Economics), United States (/full-blog/tag/United+States), President Trump (/full-blog/tag/President+Trump), Deportation (/full-blog/tag/Deportation), Immigration (/full-blog/tag/Immigration), Undocumented (/full-blog/tag/Undocumented), Unauthorized Workers (/full-blog/tag/Unauthorized+Workers), Food (/full-blog/tag/Food), Dairy (/full-blog/tag/Dairy), Immigration Reform (/full-blog/tag/Immigration+Reform), Trump (/full-blog/tag/Trump), Farms (/full-blog/tag/Farms), 2016 Election (/full-blog/tag/2016+Election)

♥ 0 Likes < Share

COMMENTS (0)

Newest First Subscribe via e-mail

Preview POST COMMENT...

Newer Post
Monsanto Faces Litigation Concerning New
Dicamba Products (/full-blog/bunnellfall)

Older Post
Community Solar Gardens: The Future of
Energy Assistance Programs? (/full-
blog/2017/11/13/slusher)

SEARCHABLE ARCHIVE (/PUBLICATION-ARCHIVE-1)

631 SOUTH LIMESTONE, LEXINGTON, KY

40508 (859) 257-4747 [BLOG.KJEANRL@GMAIL.COM](mailto:blog.kjeanrl@gmail.com) (MAILTO:BLOG.KJEANRL@GMAIL.COM)