Legislative Watch >>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>

NMPF Supports Adoption of Senate Version of Immigration Bill

The new immigration reform legislation that cleared the Senate in late April by a 62-36 vote "is a workable compromise that recognizes the need that America's dairy farmers have for qualified immigrant employees," according to Jerry Kozak, President and CEO of the National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF).

Senate leaders forged a compromise approach to updating U.S. labor and immigration laws, one that NMPF supports "because it both recognizes the need for enforcement and employment provisions," Kozak says. "There have to be two sides to the coin on this issue, which is the approach taken by the Senate," in contrast to the House of Representative's version of immigration reform, which is focused only on enforcement.

The battle over immigration reform will now shift to a handful of leaders in the House and Senate, who will be meeting in the coming months in a joint conference committee to fashion a compromise approach between the two versions. NMPF will work aggressively with other farm and agribusiness groups to ensure that the resulting bill will most closely resemble the Senate version. In particular, NMPF strongly supports inclusion of a guest worker program for agricultural employees, a key feature of the Senate bill.

"NMPF has a three-pronged approach to immigration reform, and all three elements of our position are reflected in the Senate version," Kozak says. Those elements include:

• An affordable & efficient guest-worker program that ensures the continued availability of immigrant labor for all of agriculture, including dairies. This also has to ensure that dairies have access to workers year-round, and not just seasonally, which is what some employers need.

• A provision that allows those currently employed or with recent employment history in the U.S. to earn the right to work here legally, regardless of their current legal status. Dairy production entails training and skills development, and employers need to be able to retain workers they currently employ.

• A provision that specifies that the responsibility for ultimate verification of the legal status of a worker lies with the government, not with employers. Employers have enough challenges without being asked to perform the job of government immigration agents.

NMPF will now begin communicating both with the members of the joint House-Senate conference committee, and the rest of the members in both chambers, expressing NMPF's support for an approach to immigration reform that doesn't adversely affect the ability of dairy farmers to run their farms.

"Poorly done, changing our immigration policies in ways that harshly penalize both immigrants and their employers would be detrimental to the economic viability of all dairy farms, and would not enhance our national security," Kozak says. "Our food security needs to be as much of a focus in this debate as border security. The entire food industry, from farm to fork, has a huge interest in ensuring that Congress passes a bill that realistically addresses the concerns of everyone working in agriculture."

ACTION ALERT

Contact Your Representatives Now
Dairy G.R.E.A.T. Makes it Easy!

The U.S. House and Senate will conference soon on this issue.

Discussions in Congress about immigration reform have reached a critical point. The Senate has passed a balanced and reasonable immigration reform bill. This bill and the more draconian House immigration bill must now go to Conference to create one version of the legislation.

For assistance in contacting members of the legislature, dairy farmers can visit NMPF's Dairy G.R.E.A.T. Web site by clicking on the NMPF G.R.E.A.T. logo from NMPF's main site, www.nmpf.org.

Once at the site, you can input your zip code and you will be taken to a page containing the phone numbers of your House Representative and your Senators on it, as well as talking points to make a call, send an e-mail or to write a letter to them.