U.S. Pork Industry Needs a Viable Workforce

SITUATION

The U.S. pork industry is suffering from a serious labor shortage that undermines its commitment to the highest standards of animal care. Current visa programs widely used by pork producers are not effectively addressing the issue.

Without visa reform to support a viable workforce for U.S. agriculture, animal welfare is jeopardized and production costs will increase, leading to higher food prices for consumers. In some cases, a shortage of labor could lead to farms and packing plants shutting down, causing serious financial harm to those operations and their communities. According to a study from Iowa State University researchers, the U.S. pork industry faces a constrained rural labor supply due to an aging native-born workforce and falling birth rates, making access to foreign-born workers a critical matter for the prosperity of rural America.

Reform is needed to ensure that one of the most competitive U.S. agriculture sectors can continue to provide safe and affordable pork to consumers worldwide.

NPPC POSITION

NPPC supports visa system reform that provides agricultural employers with sustained access to year-round labor. Reform could take the form of new programs or incremental changes to existing programs such as H-2A. The council supports reform that establishes a legal and productive workforce while not unduly burdening employers. NPPC also supports moving administration of agricultural visa programs to USDA.

FAST FACTS

Current visa programs utilized by pig farmers include:

- **H-2A program** Grants foreign nationals entry to the United States for temporary or seasonal agricultural work.

- **H-1B program** Allows U.S. employers to hire foreign workers in specialty occupations, including as veterinarians or farm managers, for up to a six-year period. Laws limit the number of H-1B visas issued each year.

- **TN program** Provides expedited authorization for workers from Canada and Mexico.
  - Created through the North American Free Trade Agreement.
  - Employed in specialty jobs, such as breeding managers.
  - Allows for a stay up to three years and is renewable indefinitely.