

# Dire Workforce Shortage Demands Visa System Reform



## Strengthen the H-2A Visa Program to Allow for Year-Round Workers

The H-2A visa program, created by the Immigration Reform and Control Act in 1987, allows foreign workers entry into the U.S. for seasonal agricultural work only.

With the year-round nature of the pork industry, workforce needs cannot be met by the H-2A visa program. The lack of a fully robust workforce risks disrupting the pork supply and constraining production. Addressing workforce concerns is critical for the communities where pig farms operate.

## Protecting Access to Guest Worker Programs as Rural Populations Shrink

The pork industry has developed into a capital-intensive, technology-heavy, and science-driven industry in recent decades, causing a significant uptick in demand for hiring full-time skilled and unskilled workers. Iowa State University economists found that U.S. citizens and residents do not currently and will not in the future offset the need for foreign-born workers.

One study<sup>1</sup> found that shrinking and aging rural populations, declining immigration to rural areas, and strong national labor market conditions have exacerbated the pork industry's workforce shortage.

Expanding access to the H-2A visa program is crucial for the future of the pork industry.

### Facts That Matter:

Hog farm average wages increased nearly 20% from 2021 to 2024, even as the number of employees shrank.

7 in 10 of the top hog-producing states have unemployment rates below the national unemployment rate of 4.1%.

There is no slack in rural labor markets among top hog-producing states. Census data shows a declining and aging rural workforce and average workforce participation at 80% for those 20-44 years old.

<sup>1</sup> Boessen, Artz, and Schulz, *A Baseline Study of Labor Issues and Trends in U.S. Pork Production*, 2021

We invite you to learn more about policy issues to support and strengthen America's pork producers at [NPPC.org](https://nppc.org).

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