



The Council  
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# Farm Labor Shortages

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# Introduction

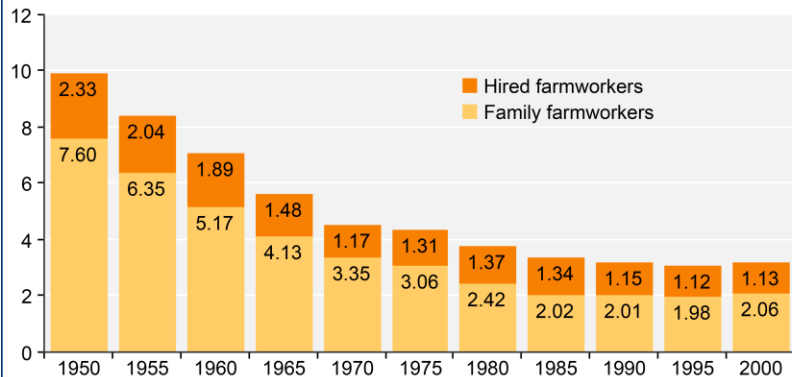
- Agriculture is an American tradition
- \$175 billion impact in 2020
- U.S. ag. workforce is shrinking
- Causes: hard physical labor, volatile pricing, unequal work-life balance
- [Farm Bureau video](#)

# Agriculture Workforce

# U.S. Population

Family and hired farmworkers on U.S. farms, 1950-2000

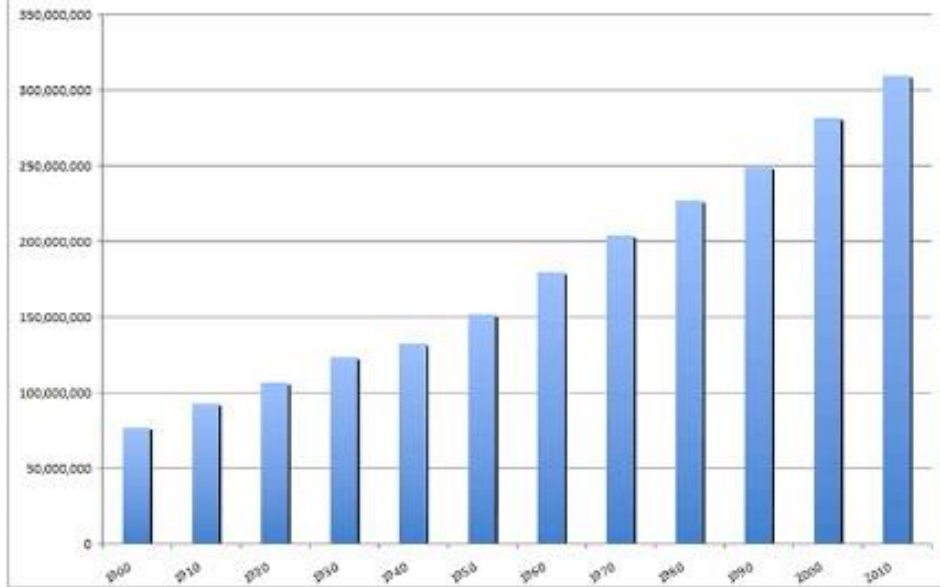
Number of farmworkers (million)



Note: Family farmworkers include self-employed farmers and unpaid family members. Hired farmworkers include direct hires and agricultural service workers employed by farm labor contractors.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, Farm Labor Survey (FLS). The FLS stopped estimating the number of family farmworkers beginning in 2001. As of 2012, the survey no longer counts contracted agricultural service workers.

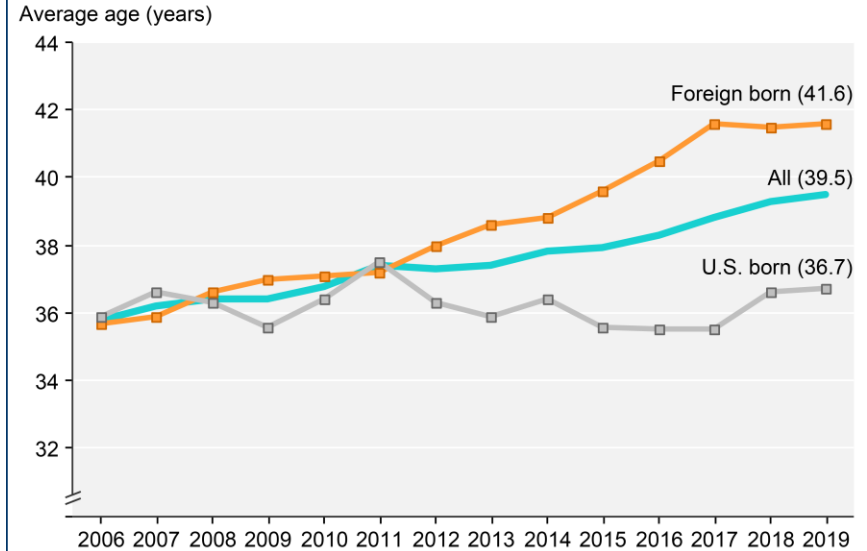
United States Population, 1900-2010



# Aging Workforce

- Farm Laborers
  - In 2006, average age of farm laborers: 35.8 years
  - In 2019: 39.5 years
- Principal Farm Operator
  - In 1978, average age of a principal farm operator: 50.3 years
  - In 2017: 59.4 years

Average age of U.S. farm laborers/ graders/ sorters by place of birth, 2006-19



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, annual American Community Survey.



# Agriculture Workforce

- USDA: estimates non-U.S. citizens are 1/3 of the agriculture workforce
- US Labor Dept.: roughly half of hired crop farmworkers are not authorized
- Farm Bureau: estimates 50 to 75% of farmworkers are undocumented



# Federal Actions



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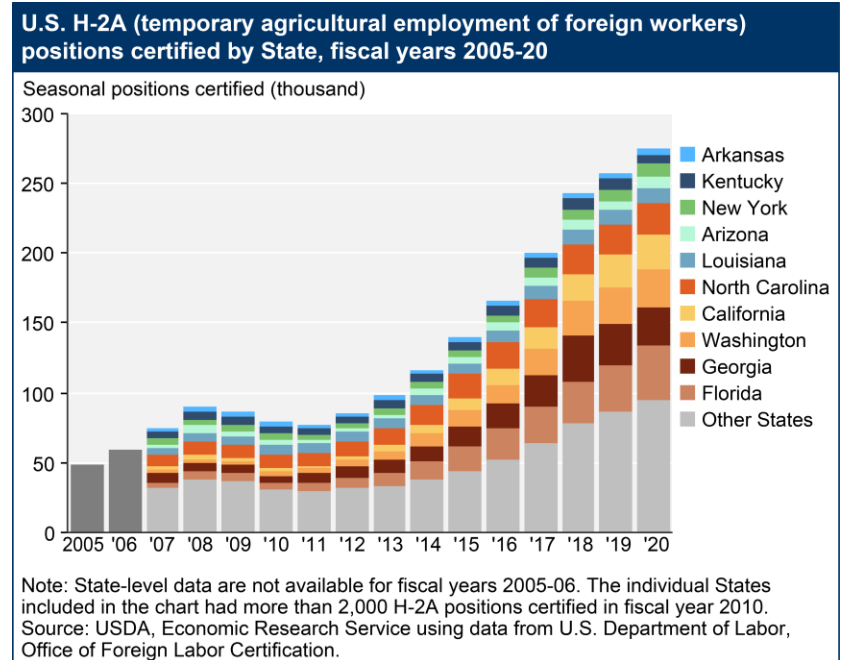
# H-2A Visa Program

- Created in 1952 to hire foreign-born farmworkers
- 10 months of seasonal farm work
- Year-round for livestock ranchers
- Must accept referrals from state workforce agency
- If no U.S. citizens are available, must provide proof



# H-2A Visa Program

- Must pay adverse effect wage rate and travel
- Guarantee employment hours in advance
- Application process: 75 days
- \$5,000-10,000 per worker for housing, meals, and travel



# Federal Farm Workforce Modernization Act

- Would create a new Certified Agricultural Worker status
- Create a path to legal permanent resident status
- Simplify the application process
- Stalled in Senate since March 2021



# State Actions

# Colorado

- Agricultural Workforce Development Program
  - Created in 2018
  - Funding for ag. interns
  - Reimburses 50% of costs, Max. \$5,000
  - Must include 130 hours of work
  - 35 internships in first two years

# Louisiana

- Agricultural Workforce Development Program
  - Established in 2020
  - Funding for ag. interns
  - Reimburses 50% of costs, Max. \$5,000
  - Must include 130 hours of work

# Minnesota

- Emerging Farmers Working Group
  - Created in 2020
  - Promote diversity in the ag. workforce
  - \$300,000 to create Emerging Farmers Office
  - \$900,000 to nonprofits supporting minority farmers

# New Mexico

- Chile Labor Incentive Program
  - Announced in 2021, implemented in 2022
  - 40-60% labor shortage
  - Used federal COVID relief money
  - \$1M in aide to supplement wages given as reimbursement

# New York

- Farm Workforce Retention Credit
  - Implemented in 2017
  - Annual tax credit to ag. employers
  - FY 2021, \$600 per employee who works 500+ hours annually
  - FY 2023, \$1,200 per eligible employee
- Farm Employer Overtime Tax Credit
  - Offsets the increased cost of overtime wages
  - Threshold is 60 hours/week for farmworkers
  - Credit of 118% for overtime wages

# Tennessee

- Agriculture Education and Youth Participation Task Force
  - Created in 2019 to expand the ag. workforce
  - In 2020 the task force issued recommendations:
    - Encourage state ag. dept. and education dept. to improve ag. education
    - Create new positions in ag. dept. to promote FFA and Supervised Ag. Experiences
    - Allow 4-H students to participate in ag. activities without absence
    - Build public-private partnerships to improve opportunities and ag. tech programs
  - Resolutions supporting the recommendations stalled in 2021 & 2022



## Conclusion

- Agriculture workforce is trending downward
- Started before COVID, has only gotten worse
- Congressional action seems unlikely
- States may be positioned to lead on this issue