



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

Team Leaders: Meghan Phillips, Honey: meghan@workbyhoney.com
David Ogilvie, Wilson Vineyards: david@wilsonvineyards.com
Kelsey Nederveld, Sacramento City Unified School District:
kelseynederveld@scusd.edu
Trish Kelly, Valley Vision: trish.kelly@valleyvision.org

Issue Expert: Trish Kelly, Valley Vision: trish.kelly@valleyvision.org

AG TECH WORKFORCE

Business Nexus

The Greater Sacramento Region's vibrant Food and Ag Cluster (production, processing, distribution, and support activities) has more than 55,000 workers and generates more than \$12.2 billion in direct economic impact to the Sacramento Region. The industry is highly productive, helping feed not only the region but the nation and beyond. It is a core sector for the region's EDA-funded Prosperity Strategy (Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy/CEDS), having been identified by the Brookings Institution as a vital competitive advantage cluster. The sustainability of our Food and Ag Industry is in jeopardy as a skilled workforce to fill needed jobs - including new farmers and farm labor as well as manufacturing (food and beverage processing) workers - is in increasingly short supply. Based on the impacts of automation, AI, and other technologies, the need for digital skills and agrifood-tech competencies is also imperative for our food and ag economy. A skilled workforce will also strengthen the region's food supply chain, which was greatly disrupted by the pandemic, and support a sustainable economic recovery.

Requested Actions

- **Increase** the funding of the USDA Beginning Farmers & Ranchers Development Program (BFRDP) and Section 2501 (Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program), under the umbrella Of the Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach (FOTO) program, which will reach its authorized \$50M funding level in 2023, split equally between SFRDP and Section 2501. The programs are oversubscribed, and the demand is high.

CA — CAP TO CAP — DC

- Support Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding increases over 2021 levels as proposed in the President's Budget Request. Specifically, in support of Title I; Adult Employment and Training Services, Youth Workforce Investment Activities, and Dislocated Worker Employment and Training Services and Apprenticeship Programs.
- Support H.R. 1603: Farm Workforce Modernization Act of 2021 to help achieve an earned legal status for Certified Agricultural Workers and improve the H-2A program.
- Support SB 486 & HR 2361: Rebuild Rural America Act to modernize infrastructure and expand investment to support local and regional food systems, sustainable agriculture production, and value-added agricultural industries. SB486 & HR 2361 will also ensure economic opportunities that create pathways to high-quality, family-sustaining jobs for all individuals in rural areas of the United States.

Brief Background

As America's Farm to Fork Capital, a skilled workforce is more important than ever to keep the region's food and cluster competitive globally; to keep agriculture viable; and to grow the next generation of farmers, food entrepreneurs, and those businesses and organizations driving the growth of an equitable, diverse, climate-resilient, innovation-driven sector. It will also provide pathways to opportunity and mobility for workers across the cluster, through upskilling and reskilling. As the home of the University of California, Davis, one of the leading agricultural and food technology universities in the world, a skilled workforce will enable farmers, food producers, and enterprises across the food system to adopt new technologies and resources being generated by both the University and the agrifood-tech entrepreneurs. These in turn are supported through a growing innovation ecosystem of global public-private partnerships and federal investments such as EDA-funded AgStart wet lab and food lab.

Investing in this workforce is critical. The region's farmworkers, processors, and retailers have been on the front-line of supplying our communities and the nation with a healthy, reliable food supply through the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, all while disruptions are still ongoing. There were already workforce gaps before the COVID-19 pandemic. The average age of a skilled farmer is 57.5 years and of a skilled manufacturing worker is 55 years. Worker retention is now another huge challenge due to the pandemic.

Without farm workers, there is no agricultural industry; yet a large portion of this workforce does not have legal status, despite their long-standing contributions and expertise. Passing the Farm Workforce Modernization Act will help to fill the worker shortages with an updated H2A program that is easier for small farmers to use. The FWMA will also provide an earned status adjustment

2022 Capitol-to-Capitol

For additional information, please contact, Director of Public Policy & Advocacy, Brandon Black at (916) 468-3509 | bblack@metrochamber.org | www.metrochamber.org



for the thousands of farmworkers who are undocumented but have been the backbone of Agriculture in the United States for the past 40 years.

In addition to upskilling and reskilling existing workers and ensuring a legal and reliable workforce, there is a great need to attract new workers into the cluster, which is why investment in career awareness, workforce training, and apprenticeships is so vital. Regional industry meetings with employers, convened by the region's community colleges and workforce boards, have validated the need for this investment across many occupations and skills, including in agrifood-tech and digital skills which is a critical emerging gap. Expanded federal investment for WIOA programs will lead to more job training, education, skills development, and innovative, proven practices like industry-based sector partnerships, career pathways, and apprenticeships.

Increased training and support resources, as well as addressing farm workforce challenges, will help retain our current workers, and train for the future, providing a pathway for recovery and better outcomes for workers, employers, consumers, and the regional economy.

Bills We Support:

SB 486 & HR 2361 - Rebuild America Act

H.R. 1603 – Farm Workforce Modernization Act