

Immigration News Today: California Senate Agriculture Committee Passes Bill Providing Undocumented Farm Workers a Work Permit



Hispanic farmworkers harvest strawberries at a farm April 28, 2006 in Carlsbad, California. (Photo : Photo by Sandy Huffaker/Getty Images)

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By [Julia Harris \(staff@latinpost.com\)](mailto:staff@latinpost.com)

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California Assembly Bill 20, which would establish a work permit program that provides a safe and legal way for undocumented immigrants to work lawfully on [California farms](#), was [passed](#) by the Senate Agriculture Committee in a 5-to-0 vote on Tuesday.

The bill was created, in part, to facilitate economic stability in California's agricultural industry.

"California's farmers are in the midst of their summer harvest season, and they are continuing to struggle with an ongoing labor shortage and a devastating drought," Democratic Assemblymember Luis Alejo of Salinas County, who authored the bill.

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"We cannot simply hope for things to get better," added Alejo. "In Washington D.C., the talks revolving around comprehensive immigration reform have stalled, and the president's executive action is still being blocked. If California wants change in immigration policy, we as state officials must stand up and lead."

Since 2007, California's agricultural industry has generated its highest sales ever recorded. In 2013, the industry reported a record \$46.4 billion. A key factor in the economic success has been the [undocumented farm workers](#) who earn a minimum wage of \$9.00 an hour and often less, [reports](#) New America Media.

California already passed Assembly Bill 60, which provided over 393,000 undocumented Californians with drivers licenses so they can legally work, and Alejo sees Assembly Bill 20 as the next logical step as it "will allow skilled, trained, and trusted farm workers to legally stay and work on California's farms."

Assembly Bill 20 will be heard next in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

The agricultural industry estimates 75 percent of farm workers across the nation are undocumented.

Over one-half of the estimated 2.5 million seasonal workers on U.S. farms and ranches lack authorized immigration status, [according to](#) Farmworker Justice, a subsidiary corporation of [National Council of La Raza](#), one of the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights organizations.

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