

Senator Charles E. Grassley

Questions for the Record

Dr. Ronald D. Knutson

1. There has been much discussion about moving the H-2A program from a certification process to an attestation process.

- a. What are the problems you face or see with the certification process?

Answer: The main problem with the current certification process is that of delay and the inability of laborers to transfer from one farm job to another employer. The consequence of delay in certification is farm labor shortages, loss of productivity, and produce waste. The current H2-A certification process is a major reason why undocumented ag workers are employed.

- b. Do you support or oppose an attestation process whereby employers who bring in foreign workers would have to “attest” that they’ve tried to find or hire an American first? Please explain.

Answer: I support attestation because it would overcome one of the major roadblocks to participation is the H2-A program. However, there are several other bureaucratic H2-A roadblocks that result in needless delays.

2. There has been a great deal of support to make E-Verify a staple in every workplace. I have been a champion of the system since it was created in 1996. There are many employers in the agricultural sector that use it. It is my hope E-Verify will be made mandatory for all employers, virtually replacing the paper I-9 process. My question is about functionality. The system is web-based. It’s free. It’s easy to use. What recommendations do you have for Congress to make sure E-Verify works even better for all sectors of the economy and for all businesses, regardless of size?

Answer: E-Verify is not a viable alternative for agriculture. The reason lies in the diversity of farms, the requirements for short-term labor moving on a migratory basis from farm-to-farm, and the lack of a viable U.S. domestic farm labor workforce. Small farms having less than \$250,000 in sales would be particularly adversely affected.

3. Senator Feinstein mentioned a proposal that would allow undocumented workers in the agricultural sector to obtain a “blue card” and stay lawfully in the United States as long as he or she continued to work in agriculture. Senator Feinstein also proposed putting biometric markers on the “blue card”.
 - a. Do you support the biometric “blue card” idea proposed by Senator Feinstein?

Answer: Yes, as long as it is implemented in a manner that avoids needless bureaucratic regulation and is properly enforced.

- b. If biometric “blue cards” were required of undocumented ag workers in the United States, who should be forced to incur the costs for a biometric reader that presumably be required of employers?

Answer: The employer, although employer access to readers should be provided by local USDA offices (county extension, FSA, etc.)

4. Many proponents argue that amnesty for those illegally here is the only viable solution to our immigration and workforce shortage problems. They claim that foreign workers are doing jobs that Americans just won’t do. On the other hand, some would argue that if you legalize the undocumented workers here now, human nature will encourage those workers to get out of agriculture and do a job that is safer, cleaner, and easier. If Congress were to legalize those working currently in agriculture, how would we deal with the future labor problems if such workers moved up the economic chain and away from agricultural work?

Answer: By requiring that the “blue card” workers return to their home country on a regular basis and by requiring that they enter the regular path to citizenship if they so desire.