

## **DRAFT SUPPORT LETTER - Agricultural Worker Program Act**

Date:

The Honorable Jimmy Panetta  
The Honorable Dianne Feinstein  
The Honorable Kamala Harris

Dear :

I write today on behalf of the Monterey County Board of Supervisors to express our support for H.R. 641/S. 175, the Agricultural Worker Program Act (AWPA). The AWPA is modeled after the agricultural worker provisions contained in the comprehensive immigration reform legislation that passed the Senate in 2013.

The AWPA would create a program within the Department of Homeland Security that would allow agricultural workers and their families to apply for a “Blue Card” that gives them legal status and work authorization if they show consistent employment in U.S. agriculture over the past two years, pay a fine, and pass a thorough background check. Farmworkers who maintain blue card status for the next three or five years, depending on the total hours worked in agriculture, would be eligible to adjust to a green card or legal permanent residency.

As you know, agriculture is the cornerstone of prosperity in Monterey County, contributing a total of \$8.1 billion and 76,000 jobs to the local economy. The Salinas Valley, known as the “salad bowl” of the nation, produces a variety of crops that are shipped to customers all over the world. Most of these specialty crops, such as strawberries and leafy green vegetables, have been hand-picked by immigrant farmworkers for generations, mainly because farmers are unable to secure an adequate workforce without them.

Current immigration policies make it increasingly difficult to meet with workforce needs of an industry that is highly dependent on an adequate supply of immigrant labor. The County is becoming increasingly concerned with reports of labor shortages affecting the agricultural industry that threaten the economic vitality of the region. In California alone, the U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates losses attributed to labor shortages has cost farmers millions of dollars per year as fruit and other crops are left to rot in the field because of a lack of farmworkers to bring in the harvest. The County believes the AWPA strikes the right balance between the needs of workers and employers.

Monterey County greatly appreciates all of your hard work to address this critical problem on the Central Coast and across the state. Your leadership role on this issue is welcomed by the County, and we stand ready to assist you in moving this legislation forward in Congress.

Sincerely,

John M. Phillips  
Chair, Board of Supervisors