



News Release

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"Connecting Cows, Cooperatives, Capitol Hill, and Consumers"

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NMPF Study Finds Dairy Farms Rely Heavily on Foreign Workers

Losing Immigrant Laborers Would Reduce Farm Numbers, Increase Unemployment

ARLINGTON, VA – A comprehensive national survey of the employment practices of America's dairy farmers found that they rely heavily on foreign-born workers, the loss of which would cripple many farms and create a ripple effect of job losses through the rural economy, according to the National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF), which sponsored the survey. A copy of the full survey can be found at www.nmpf.org.

Working with researchers at Texas AgriLife Research, a component of the Texas A&M University System, NMPF surveyed more than 2,000 dairy farms last fall to assess their hiring practices. The survey found that U.S. dairies employed 138,000 full-time equivalent workers, of which 57,000, or 41%, were foreigners.

Respondents reported that they paid their workers \$506 in average weekly wages, while most also reported providing at least one non-wage benefit to employees, such as paid vacation, housing, and/or insurance. Those non-wage benefits brought average dairy workers salaries in 2008 to \$31,521, significantly higher than salaries in the landscaping, ranching, and fast food sectors, which employ similar proportions of immigrant workers.

Texas AgriLife Research estimated that if federal labor and immigrant policies were to result in the loss of just half of the 57,000 foreign-born dairy workers, an additional 66,000 workers would also be lost, due to the closure of some dairy farms, and the resulting multiplier effect of fewer jobs in grain and fertilizer production and sales, veterinary services, milk hauling, and related agricultural service jobs. This would produce an economic loss of \$11 billion.

"At a time of rising unemployment across America, our elected officials need to understand that the need for rational immigration reform is all the more imperative," said Jerry Kozak, President and CEO of NMPF. "Congress needs to act quickly to pass legislation such as the AgJobs bill, recently introduced in both the House and Senate. AgJobs is a step towards comprehensive reform of the nation's immigration laws, which is clearly needed."

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The dairy analysis also indicated that consumers likely would see higher retail dairy product prices, as the loss of farm labor would, in turn, cause farms to reduce or cease their production, reducing the overall U.S. dairy supply. Texas AgriLife Research calculated that a 50% reduction in the dairy immigration workforce would lower milk production by 7.9%, leading to a 30% increase in retail prices.

“Punitive or unworkable labor policies may appear to be intended to help American-born workers, but what this survey found is that without access to immigrant workers, the economics of the entire dairy industry, as well as many rural communities and other industries, are negatively affected,” said Mike McCloskey, a dairy farmer from Fair Oaks, Indiana, and chair of NMPF’s Immigration Task Force. “You can’t extract immigrant workers out of the equation without creating a negative ripple effect that hurts many other workers as well.”

“We need labor policies that will help us maintain our existing workforce, and ensure we have viable ways of obtaining workers in the future,” McCloskey said. “A failure by our lawmakers to act cannot be an option, because tens of thousands of workers are depending on us finding a way to address farm labor needs.”

The National Milk Producers Federation, based in Arlington, VA, develops and carries out policies that advance the well being of dairy producers and the cooperatives they own. The members of NMPF’s 31 cooperatives produce the majority of the U.S. milk supply, making NMPF the voice of more than 40,000 dairy producers on Capitol Hill and with government agencies. For more information, visit www.nmpf.org.