

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to testify in front of this esteemed Committee today on behalf of my fellow citrus growers in the great state of Florida.

I want to thank Congressman Tim Mahoney who represents my hometown of Lake Placid for his steadfast support of agriculture, specifically Specialty Crops such as Citrus, which is a major economic engine in rural Central Florida.

The Florida citrus industry generates a statewide economic impact of close to \$9 Billion a year and is the heart of my family's business. In Florida we produce almost 80% of all orange juice consumed in the United States. We supply a wholesome product that provides our fellow citizens with essential vitamins and nutrients.

My grandfather started our family business in 1933 with a fourth grade education and 10 acres of thrown away grove. Through years of hard work along with countless blessings from the Lord, that business has grown to over 3,100 acres of citrus and 13,000 acres of cattle ranchland and wildlife conservation areas. As a 3rd Generation Florida citrus grower the issue of Ag Labor is critical to my family's business.

The importance of maintaining a safe, affordable and abundant domestic food supply is something many Americans care deeply about and is something I know growers care deeply about also.

Shifting food production from our shores to overseas could compromise food security and in-turn homeland security.

If Florida's citrus crop is left in the grove to rot because of a labor shortage then our Nation's

citrus production will eventually shift entirely to Central and South America.

This is not an attempt by me to paint a doomsday scenario, it is the reality of fruit and vegetable production in this country and specifically the Florida citrus industry.

I've heard and read many criticisms directed at farmers that say the solution to our labor issue lies in either paying workers more or turning to mechanical harvesting equipment.

But I'm here to tell you that the minimum wage rate in Florida is **\$6.67** an hour which is higher than the federal wage rate of **\$5.85**. In Florida a worker harvesting citrus averages close to \$10.00 an hour.

I'm proud of the salaries we pay our employees.

As for mechanical harvesting it is something we are very interested in using and I hope the industry's mechanical harvesting program

continues to receive support from Congress. It sure is a lot easier to manage a few harvesting machines than a large workforce. As growers we have actively worked through our trade associations such as Florida Citrus Mutual to lobby our state and federal representatives for research funds to study mechanical harvesting and abscission chemicals to make the process easier.

However, these machines are multi-million dollar pieces of equipment that are not financially feasible for medium and small growers to use at this time.

More importantly is the fact that the machines are not technologically to the point where we can harvest fruit without causing long term tree and fruit damage.

Even if we could, mechanical harvesting still requires a crew of workers to glean what fruit is left on the tree and ground.

Mechanical harvesting provides Florida growers with hope, however, the process still has a long way to go before it becomes an industry standard.

So in the current environment growers have two options:

We either have to try to find legal domestic workers through traditional methods or use the costly and cumbersome H-2A Agricultural guest-worker program.

Please, believe me when I tell you that we want legal workers.

The last thing that a grower wants to keep him awake at night is wondering about the legal status of his workforce.

We have plenty of other things to worry about with weather, plant pests & diseases, and energy costs.

I'll reiterate: We want legal workers.

In conclusion we have worked very hard as an Industry with our partners in the agricultural community to push Congress to create an efficient guest worker program that serves us better than the current H-2A process.

As an industry we are disappointed that our best efforts toward comprehensive immigration reform failed to pass this year.

We are going to continue to work hard so that some kind of solution is eventually crafted.

The future sustainability of American agriculture is very important to me as a farmer raising three children alongside my wife Tracee. My family understands it is essential to have legal, reliable workers harvesting our crops and helping put orange juice on breakfast tables across America. We also understand that without legal, reliable workers, Florida's citrus industry will be another closed chapter in the history of U.S. agriculture.

I thank the Committee for your time.