

House Transportation Committees Public Hearing to discuss House Bill 279 (Burgos)

Testimony respectfully submitted by Hannah Smith-Brubaker, executive director - 8/11/2021

Hello, my name is Hannah Smith-Brubaker. I am a farmer in rural Pennsylvania. My children, should they choose to come back to the farm after college, would be the 12th generation to farm since their Mennonite ancestors settled in Juniata County. As is the case with most farms today, one of us works off-farm as well and that is me. I serve as the executive director of Pasa Sustainable Agriculture. Now in our 30th year, we have over 7,500 members across the Commonwealth and work within a broader network of 60,000 throughout the northeast and mid-atlantic regions.

Pasa supports the efforts of MILPA and the Driving Pennsylvania Forward coalition to ensure access to drivers licenses for all Pennsylvania residents, regardless of legal status.

According to the US Dept of Labor's latest Agricultural Workers Research Report, the share of hired crop farmworkers who were not legally authorized to work in the United States grew from roughly 14 percent in 1989 to, in recent years, just under 50 percent. And, perhaps more relevant to this discussion, more than 80 percent of hired crop farmworkers are not migrant workers but are considered settled, meaning that they work at a single location within 75 miles of their home.

When the pandemic virtually shut down the normal flow of agricultural goods and production last March, it was only a matter of days before Pennsylvania Secretary Russell Redding declared all agricultural workers to be essential. After all, we all need food to live. In a matter of a few weeks, Pasa and the Department of Agriculture worked on a series of guidances to keep food handling safe, to keep customers safe, to keep food available safely through farm markets, direct sales and other creative arrangements, and to keep farm workers themselves safe.

Today we're here to ask you again to keep all of us safe - farm workers as well as the rest of us. Regardless of the legislative members' position on a path to citizenship or other issues related to immigration, our food system is highly reliant on undocumented farm workers. In fact, were we to remove all undocumented farmworkers today, our food system would utterly collapse. If we were to work toward transitioning undocumented farm workers out of the food system, we have no one to replace them. Again, regardless of your individual position, we have undocumented farm workers essentially securing our food system. Many with children, born here in the United States. These families are on our roads, in our schools, shopping alongside us and paying taxes. It is in all our best interest to have drivers educated about road safety and licensed to drive, no matter what lies ahead for them.

For Pennsylvania's 52,000 farms and 7.3 million acres of farmland with \$83.8 billion in direct economic output, 280,500 jobs and \$10.9 billion in earnings, farmworkers have been steadfast for all of us through the pandemic, risking their lives and their health every day to keep our food production system going. At Pasa, we see each and every agricultural worker as part of the overall fabric of farming in Pennsylvania. We all depend on the crops they grow and the animals they raise. It only makes sense for all of us that every person driving on our roads is doing so safely.