

Committee Report on a Study of the Agricultural Migrant Worker Visa

League of Women Voters Grand Traverse
Leelanau Unit Study Committee

February 2011-2012

Study Scope: To study the past, current and proposed employment methods and work visa programs used by the agricultural employers in our area.

Public Program, February 1, 2012

Committee Members:

Suzanne Hoff – Study Chair
Vina Mikesell – Unit Chair
Marsha Buehler
B.J. Christensen
Patty DeYoung
Jay Johnson
Marian Kromkowski
Steve Morse

The League of Women Voters, a non-partisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. Membership is open to American citizens, male and female, who are eighteen years of age and older.

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The National League of Women Voters Position on Immigration, April, 2008, includes support for:

Improved technology to facilitate employer verification of employee status;

Verification documents, such as status cards and work permits, with secure identifiers;

Significant fines and penalties for employers who hire unauthorized workers;

Improved technology for sharing information among federal agencies; and

More effective tracking of individuals who enter the United States and increased personnel at borders.

The League also supports programs allowing foreign workers to enter and leave the United States to meet seasonal or sporadic labor needs.

Local Study Scope: *To study the past, current and proposed employment methods and work visa programs used by agricultural employers in our area.*

Committee Report

1. Introduction and Chronology– Suzanne Hoff, Study Chair
 2. Process and Procedure of This Study– Vina Mikesell
 3. The Importance of Local Agriculture and Its Workers – Marsha Buehler
 4. Current Visa Documents and E-Verify – B.J. Christensen
 5. Non-governmental Guest Worker Policies and Proposals – Marian
 6. Current Guest Worker Legislation– Jay Johnson Kromkowski
 7. What Our Interviewees Say – Steve Morse
 8. Summary, Q and A – Moderator, Suzanne Hoff
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- A. Glossary – Patty DeYoung and Vina Mikesell
 - B. Chronology
 - C. State Legislation Map
 - D-5. Non-governmental Proposals, Full Text - Marian Kromkowski

UPNorth TV Program Broadcast– February 13, 15, 17 - Channel 97(analog), Channels 2 & 992(digital). Online viewing at www.upnorthmedia.org, Feb. 14 – August 13, 2012

For information: League of Women Voters Grand Traverse – www.lwvgta.org, "Contact Us"

**League of Women Voters Grand Traverse Area Leelanau Unit
Agricultural Migrant Visa Study Public Program
February 1, 2012**

Introduction

Suzanne Hoff

Welcome to our program today. I'd like to start with these observations. Perhaps you, like I do, love living in the heart of rolling farmland that provides us with beautiful vistas, fresh produce, and delectable food products. A vibrant agricultural economy – some farms owned by generations of the same family – may give you a sense of a strong, stable community that values hard work and thoughtful business practices. You may see agriculture as a source of recreation, attending or sending guests to our National Cherry Festival or to a vineyard to taste our award winning wines. However, for those on the growing, harvesting and processing side of this story agriculture is more than recreation. It is a way of life. A business fraught with unknowns. Yet, it endures as an economy that has long been the lifeblood of our communities. I speak here of our local agriculture that serves statewide and national markets. What circumstance can put this economy at risk?

It is when agricultural employers can't find skilled, reliable, seasonal workers.

As you came through the hallway you may have picked up several study sheets. One is the program sheet. In the middle of the sheet you'll find a statement of the scope of our study. This statement was an important step in focusing our study given the larger complex national discussion on immigration.

Noted at the bottom of that sheet, UPNorth TV is filming this presentation for broadcast after February 10, times and dates to be announced. Our program will also be available for viewing on the UPNorthTV website. You will also see the website URL for the League of Women Voters Grand Traverse Area. If you wish to receive an email packet of this presentation please sign the appropriate sheet provided at the entrance door.

-The reverse side of the program sheet is a glossary of terms relevant to this study.

-The second sheet is a brief chronology of the United States' migrant/foreign worker practices and legislation since 1619. Nearly 400 years ago our national labor history began with kidnapping, buying, or soliciting foreign workers to do our hard labor. Eventually, we negotiated with other countries for their workers, then legislated to control this ebb and flow. You'll find in this abbreviated chronology much of the focus has been on Hispanic workers. Asian, European and Caribbean migrant workers have also had an important impact on the development and economy of the United States.

-The third sheet, in color, illustrates states' legislation and will be referenced in Jay's presentation.

We aren't here to persuade you to view this issue in a particular light. Our intent with this study is to become better informed on the challenges faced by our local agricultural employers and to learn the impact Federal and State visa/work permit legislation has on agricultural business practices.

I'd like to introduce you to our study committee members in alphabetical order:

Marsha Buehler, B.J. Christenson, Patty DeYoung, Suzanne Hoff, Jay Johnson, Marian Kromkowski, Vina Mikesell, and Steve Morse.

This has been an informative study for our committee. Please hold your questions for the Q and A period at the end.

Let's begin our program.