

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact:

Ramon Ramirez, President, PCUN (503) 989-0073  
Erik Sorensen, Communications, CAUSA (503) 789-8213  
John Aguirre, Oregon Association of Nurseries (503) 682-5089  
Andrea Cano, Oregon Farm Worker Ministry (503) 990 0611  
Felisa Hagins, SEIU Local 49 (503) 789-2054  
Alisha Rosas, United Farm Workers (909) 969-7284

Organizations From Across Oregon Call on Congress for Swift Passage of AgJOBS

Salem Oregon -- Today, labor, faith and agricultural industry organizations from across Oregon joined together to call on Congress for swift passage of one bi-partisan solution, AgJOBS, a step which the majority of Americans agree, is in the right direction.

Since the failure of the bi-partisan Comprehensive Immigration Reform Bill (S.1348) in June, Congress has been at a standstill on anything related to immigration reform. And, with new regulations put forth by the Bush Administration last month requiring employers to match social security numbers with employees, the Congress is no closer to solving our broken immigration system than it was two months ago.

The Agricultural Jobs, Opportunity, Benefits, and Security (AgJobs) Act (S.237/ H.R.371), is a measure that has strong bipartisan support. AgJobs is a needed to create a safe, legal, and orderly process for current undocumented workers still in the shadows and future workers to enter the United States legally. It reflects both an historic agreement between the representatives of farm workers and the agricultural industry, and the pressing need, for humanitarian, economic, and security reasons, to reform our immigration laws in this sector of our economy. This measure would create an earned adjustment program for undocumented farm workers who would be eligible to apply for temporary immigration status based on their past work experience, and could become permanent residents upon satisfying prospective work requirements. The legislation would also streamline the existing H-2A foreign agricultural worker program while preserving and enhancing key labor protections.

"PCUN remains firmly committed providing a strong, legal worker program for the people who put food on our tables every day," said Ramon Ramirez, President of Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United. "We need congress to pass AgJOBS now as it represents a balanced solution for American agriculture, a critical element of a comprehensive solution, and one that can be enacted now with broad bipartisan support".

"The worker shortage crisis has been perpetuated by the glaring lack of action by Congress and therefore creates and untenable assault on agriculture," said John Aguirre, Executive Director of the Oregon Association of Nurseries. "The new enforcement-only immigration policy will produce enormous disruption to the nursery industry. We are committed to push for AgJOBS this fall; it is our top priority".

"The labor of women and men in the fields, orchards, dairies, cattle and

chicken ranches, nurseries, and canneries contributes significantly to the economy of this state. Our popular restaurants, supermarkets, fast food chains, bakeries, and breweries also profit and benefit from Oregon's agricultural bounty," said Andrea Cano, Executive Director of Oregon Farm Worker Ministries. "AgJOBS secures a stable work force for the growers."

"Immigrants are vital to our economy, and integral to our communities. This nation will be stronger and more secure when we reward immigrants for their contributions and invite them to come out of the shadows," said Felisa Hagins, Political Director of SEIU Local 49. "AgJOBS recognizes that hard-working, tax-paying immigrants deserve a shot at the American Dream -- we urge our leaders to come together and get it done."

"The agriculture industry in Oregon is a major contributor to the economy. AgJOBS is bipartisan legislation that also has the support of growers and farm workers," said Diana Tellefson of United Farm Workers. "Presently, farm workers across the nation are meeting with Congress members to ask that they move forward the only real solution to the country's broken immigration system--AgJOBS".

It is time for Congress to take responsibility and pass this long-overdue measure. The status quo and lack of action in solving our nation's broken immigration system is no longer acceptable. AgJobs is a needed step on the road to immigration reform. We urge Congress to do its duty and swiftly take up and pass this important measure.

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