

PGI Newsletter

Volume 2 Issue 2



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Immigration, A Critical Issue

Idaho Immigration Coalition Formed

The Idaho Dairymen's Association (IDA) has launched an effort to promote the need for responsible immigration reform by leading the formation of an Immigration Coalition in Idaho. IDA has pledged to match all donations made by other groups to the new coalition.

PGI has long supported passage of AgJOBS legislation to address agriculture's need for workers, as well as comprehensive legislation to address everything from border security to a reasonable way to deal with the estimated 12 million undocumented people already living and working in the U.S. Unfortunately this whole issue has been held captive by a hysteria to call every sensible solution "amnesty." In fact, during the most recent Congressional debate on the subject, over 99 percent of calls to Idaho Congressional offices asked representatives to vote no on the issue.

Idaho agriculture, along with other employers, has to be much more effective in telling its side of the story on this critical issue. In a recent visit to each of Idaho's Congressional delegation in Washington D.C., each expressed the need for agriculture to be more proactive in telling its side of the immigration story. They recognize the severe labor shortages facing agriculture. Most of them believe a compromise is needed that addresses the amnesty issue, while still solving the overall problem. They also need us to help educate the voting public about the real issues growers face in trying to hire a legal workforce. It was for this

reason that the dairymen decided to take a proactive position on immigration. The early members of the coalition include: Idaho Farm Bureau, Idaho Dairymen's Association, Idaho Cattlemen's Association, Milk Producers of Idaho, Idaho Bankers Association, Northwest Farm Credit Association and the Snake River Farmer's Association. The coalition also plans to reach out to non-ag employers. We understand that the Idaho Potato Commission is considering membership.

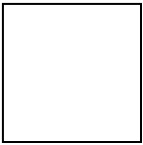
Snake River Farmer's Association Reacts to Labor Needs

The Snake River Farmer's Association has responded to agricultural labor needs by helping over 350 Idaho members contract to bring nearly 1,800 legal workers to the state. At association meetings held March 27th and 28th in Idaho Falls and Twin Falls, growers heard from prominent immigration expert Dr. James Holt. These are some of the key points Dr. Holt highlighted:

- 1.4 million more jobs are created each year in the United States than new U.S. born workers are available.
- 78 percent of farm workers are foreign born.
- 99 percent of new farm workers are illegal.
- The Social Security Mismatch Rule will be implemented this summer. Employers will have 90 days to correct issues or let employees go.
- Stiffer employer sanctions are under consideration, including retroactively disallowing tax deductions for wages paid to illegal workers.

Dr. Holt also reported that efforts are currently under way to provide a temporary, five-year improvement to the H2-A program to help agriculture, which is called the Emergency Agricultural Relief Act. *(Continue on page 2)*





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Newsletter from the Potato Growers of Idaho

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The act is designed to avoid issues surrounding amnesty, but is only a temporary fix until a wider solution can be passed by Congress. PGI encourages growers to contact the Snake River Farmer's Association at (208) 436-9737 for more information regarding H2-A. Growers are also encouraged to contact their local IPC representative to encourage the IPC to actively work for solutions to these critical labor issues.

Crop Disaster Program

Signup continues for the Crop Disaster Program for crops planted in 2005, 2006, or 2007. Although there will be a quality component to the disaster

program, it has not yet been announced. Growers who believe they may be eligible for the quality loss program should stay in contact with their local FSA office.

Potato Gift Boxes

The PGI Board of Directors decided that the annual tradition of giving potato gift boxes to both state legislative and executive offices fits the new role of PGI, so once again over 250 gift boxes were assembled and taken to Boise. Those assisting PGI Executive Director, Keith Esplin, were board members James Hoff and Kamren Koompin, along with Kamren's brother Kael.