



Louise Slaughter, has led the effort to ensure that Western New York farmers can access the labor they need. The federal government's H-2A visa program has traditionally suffered from delays, paperwork burdens and confusion for growers. These bureaucratic hurdles put the prosperity of Western New York farmers at risk. As the number one economic driver in Upstate New York, a thriving agriculture industry is essential for the Empire State.

Western New York farmers faced a challenging spring when late frosts damaged crops across the region. On May 17, 2012, Rep. Slaughter wrote to Governor Cuomo to move forward with the process of obtaining a Secretarial Disaster Declaration from the US Department of Agriculture. Such a declaration would provide farmers with the economic stability they need to recover from lost crops and continue to provide the world's best produce without pause.

On June 6, 2012, Slaughter's efforts proved successful, as the USDA [announced disaster designations](#) for counties throughout Western New York. With this news, farmers in Western New York will be able to bounce back and continue providing the world's best produce throughout the remainder of the growing season and well into the future.

In addition to assisting farmers in their time of need, Slaughter has led the fight to cut red tape and make the H-2A visa program work for Western New York farmers. She has built a partnership between herself, the Department of Labor and WNY farmers- a partnership that has

led to significant changes to the way the program is administered.

Specifically, because of the partnership:

- **Making Better Use of the Internet.** New York is one of the selected states to participate in a pilot e-mail program allowing the Department of Labor to communicate more efficiently with growers. In addition, a dedicated e-mail address has been established for growers to ask direct questions to the National Processing Center in Chicago (TLC.Chicago@dol.gov).

- **Establishing a Web-Based Filing System.** The Department of Labor is also working to develop a new web-based filing system for the H-2A program that will allow growers to check an application's status electronically. The Labor Department announced that the new system should be ready for implementation in late summer 2012.

- **Providing More Guidance Before Filing.** The Department of Labor has [developed "filing tips"](#) based on actual problems encountered by growers. The Department continues to post [Frequently Asked Questions](#) on an ongoing basis and published an H-2A Small Business Handbook fall 2011. Resources were made readily accessible on the Department's website, such as the [Adverse Effect Wage Rate](#) for their state.

- **Frequent Communication with Growers.** The Department of Labor held three "stakeholder" conference calls this past winter and will continue to seek input and advise from the grower community to discuss emerging issues to address before they turn into a larger problem.

Slaughter has dedicated herself to solving this issue because at risk are Upstate New York's seasonal fruit and vegetable crops and thousands of jobs in Upstate New York. Growers from across Upstate and across the country have long said that the H-2A guestworker program needs improvements to help ensure access to the labor necessary to keep America's farms running.

Timeline of Slaughter's Work to Get Local Growers Access to the Labor They Need

- In March 2011, Slaughter met with local farmers and staff from the Department of Labor in her Washington office where they outlined their concerns with the cumbersome H-2A application process.
- Last June, Slaughter [wrote to U.S. Department of Labor Secretary Hilda Solis](#) outlining the concerns of farmers as they experienced more inconsistencies in their H-2A applications saying, "According to farmers in my district, many who have participated in the program for decades, the H-2A program has become increasingly difficult to use as a result of the multiple changes that have occurred in the past five years."
- In July, Slaughter hosted a [follow up summit with Deputy Secretary Seth Harris](#) , Members of Congress and several regional growers that allowed many of the concerns raised consistently by local growers to be addressed directly by the Department of Labor.
- In September, [Deputy Secretary Harris wrote to Slaughter](#) pledging to complete eight actionable items to improve the administration of the program by making better use of the internet, establishing a web-based filing system, providing more guidance to growers before they file necessary paperwork, and making Department representatives available to growers early in the process to more quickly iron out any discrepancies.
- In December, the Department of Labor [released an Employer Handbook](#) for employers anticipating filing an H-2A application for next season. The 16-page hand book, complete with information on filing job orders and H-2A applications, conducting recruitment for U.S. workers, completing the temporary labor certification process and other helpful resources, [can be found here.](#)
- In January, the Department of Labor announced in a letter to Slaughter that they have awarded a contract to a firm that will begin the process of [putting elements of the H-2A program online](#)
- In April, Slaughter's office [hosted a conference call with more than a dozen local growers](#) and top officials at the Labor Department to discuss the improvements made to the process since the July meeting.