

WASHINGTON – Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (NY-28) yesterday evening hosted a meeting with local fruit and vegetable growers and Deputy Secretary of Labor Seth Harris.

The meeting finally gave growers from across Upstate direct access to the federal officials that approve and deny requests for seasonal workers, a process which has grown increasingly inconsistent in recent years. Slaughter was joined by Representatives Kathy Hochul (NY-26) who highlighted the concerns of local growers for a consistent and timely process for the approval of seasonal workers.

At risk are Upstate New York's seasonal crops - apples, grapes, and food crops – that create thousands of jobs in Upstate New York and contribute millions of dollars to the regional economy. Farmers from across Upstate and across the country have long said that the guest worker program that gives them access to the labor they need must be streamlined.

In recent years, they report, the H-2A program has become increasingly cumbersome with much higher rates of denials and deficiencies being issued. Upstate growers have also expressed concern about excessive time delays, paperwork burdens, and confusion with both growers and administrators of the program.

“Farmers are the biggest gamblers on earth. Every year they put everything on the line with the hopes that the weather will cooperate. They've told us that they need this labor to keep their farms profitable and local fruits on our shelves, so we have to do everything in our power to help them, said Slaughter who organized the two-hour meeting that included several members of Congress, the Deputy Secretary, several top level Department of Labor staff, local growers and grower advocacy organizations. “This was one of the best meetings I've had in my time in Congress and I want to thank my friend Deputy Secretary Harris for coming with his staff to listen to our growers. Together we were able to have a very productive discussion about the inconsistencies growers face as they apply for seasonal workers and were able to explain the very serious consequences of not having the labor they need. Farmers have told me that without the necessary labor, they have been forced to pull up their crops, and if that means fewer crops are grown in Upstate New York, then we need to help them. This is a matter of American jobs. Our Upstate farmers cannot afford to play Russian Roulette, hoping that their paperwork is filed on time.”

“Over the last few days, I have been meeting with farmers from Upstate New York and speaking with them about their concerns about hiring an adequate workforce,” said Congresswoman Hochul. “Yesterday, along with a number of my colleagues in the House, we took those concerns right to the Department of Labor where we discussed the need to reform the H-2A visa program, which currently is riddled with red tape and bureaucratic hurdles. The fact that some farmers are literally mailing pounds and pounds of forms in to hire H-2A workers is preposterous. We need to make better use of technology and the internet, which is why I am glad Deputy Secretary Harris has agreed to take this idea back to the Department of Labor and

try and shrink the paper work overwhelming farmers seeking temporary help to bring in the crops.”

[Photos from yesterday's meeting are available here](#) .

Agriculture is the leading economic driver in Upstate New York. New York has a diverse agricultural sector ranking second in the nation for apple production, third in the nation for production of grapes for juice and wine, and fourth in the production of several key vegetable crops including cucumbers and snap beans. Many of these crops, including apples, strawberries and several vegetables rely on seasonal workers, many of whom come to the United States temporarily to assist with the harvest season.

The efficient administration of the H-2A program is a matter of saving American jobs. It is estimated that for every farm owner and farm employee, there are three jobs directly related to agriculture in off-the-farm employment, with many of these positions held by American workers. In New York, this means 59,000 on-farm jobs and over 150,000 related off-the-farm jobs are reliant on a reliable H-2A program.

Background

In March, Slaughter met with local farmers and representatives from the Department of Labor in her Washington office.

On June 14, Slaughter wrote to Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis outlining the concerns of farmers as they experienced more inconsistencies in their H-2A applications. Her letter is [available here](#) .

On July 12, Slaughter and Hochul along with eight other members of the New York House delegation urged the Secretary to process H-2A requests in an expeditious fashion. A copy of that letter is [available here](#) .

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