

Rural Migration News Blog 35
H-2A program continues to Expand

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DOL certified 112,200 farm jobs to be filled in the first half of FY18, up 15 percent from 96,800 in the first half of FY17. Florida and Georgia accounted for a quarter of first half certifications, followed by Washington and California with 20 percent. Berries was the largest single crop requesting H-2A workers, accounting for 11 percent of job certifications.

There is no cap on the number of H-2A workers who can be admitted to the US. DOL certified over 200,000 jobs to be filled with H-2A guest workers in FY17. If the H-2A program expands by 15 percent in FY18, there will be 230,000 farm jobs certified.

The H-2A program has since 1987 (the program was called H-2 between 1952 and 1987) allowed farmers anticipating too few farm workers to apply to DOL for certification to employ guest workers. DOL certification involves ensuring that there are not US workers who are able, willing, and qualified, and who will be available at the time and place needed, to fill the jobs that farmers want to fill with guest workers, and that the presence of the H-2A workers will not adversely affect similar US workers.

Between the 1950s and the 1990s, most H-2A workers were Jamaicans who cut sugar cane in Florida and picked apples along the eastern seaboard. Just before the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 was enacted, DOL certified 20,700 farm jobs to be filled with then H-2 workers in FY85, including 10,000 to cut sugar cane just south of Lake Okeechobee. The mechanization of the sugar cane harvest in the early 1990s and the upsurge in illegal immigration after IRCA reduced H-2A certifications to 15,100 in FY95, including 4,100 in tobacco.

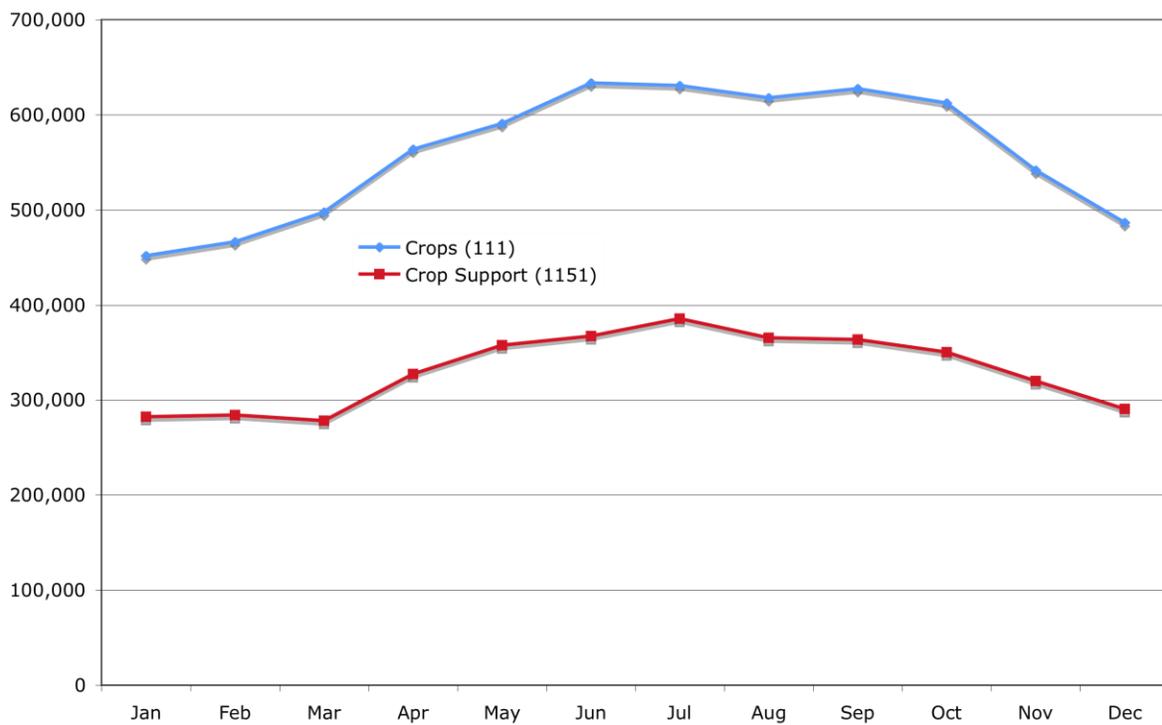
In FY17, when over 200,000 jobs were certified, almost 22,000 were in berries, followed by 12,700 in apples and 12,500 in tobacco. H-2A workers continue to pick apples in New York and other northeastern states, but most H-2A apple pickers are employed in WA, which produces two-thirds of US apples.

In 2016, average employment covered by unemployment insurance on US crop farms (NAICS 111) was 560,000, and average employment in crop support services (1151) that bring workers to farms was 334,000, making average UI-covered employment in crop agriculture 891,000. UI covers all workers, including H-2A workers, in states such as

California, but does not cover workers on smaller farms and H-2A workers in some states. If the UI data cover 85 percent of crop workers, there are an average one million workers employed on US crop farms.

Most H-2A workers are in the US less than the usual 10-month maximum stay. The best estimate is that the average H-2A worker is in the US six months, so that 230,000 jobs certified in FY 18 would mean that 115,000 or almost 12 percent of average employment in US crop agriculture was performed by H-2A workers.

UI-Covered Crop and Crop Support Employment, 2016



OFFICE OF FOREIGN LABOR CERTIFICATION

H-2A Temporary Agricultural Labor Certification Program - Selected Statistics, FY 2018 YTD

Applications Received¹

FYTD	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	% Change FY 2017
7,483	2,756	4,727	--	--	15.4%

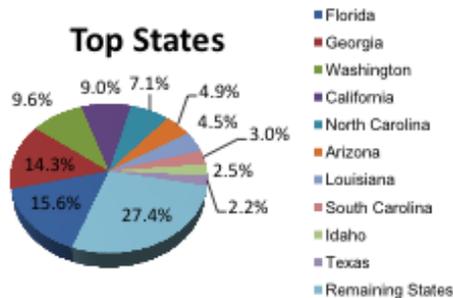
Applications Processed

Determination	FYTD	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Total Determinations	6,674	1,731	4,943	--	--
- Certified	6,482	1,626	4,856	--	--
- Denied	74	39	35	--	--
- Withdrawn	118	66	52	--	--
Positions Requested	115,142	33,609	81,533	--	--
Positions Certified	112,214	31,866	80,348	--	--
Processed Timely²	92.1%	96.7%	90.2%	--	--

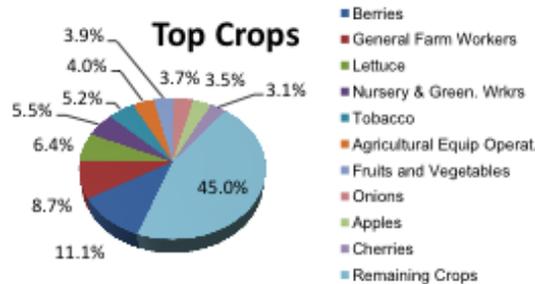
Selected Statistics by Worker Positions Certified

Review of Positions Certified FY 2018 YTD (% of total certified FY 2018 YTD)			
Top 10 States	Florida	17,493	15.6%
	Georgia	16,004	14.3%
	Washington	10,751	9.6%
	California	10,092	9.0%
	North Carolina	7,952	7.1%
	Arizona	5,496	4.9%
	Louisiana	5,014	4.5%
	South Carolina	3,410	3.0%
	Idaho	2,811	2.5%
	Texas	2,461	2.2%
Top 10 Employers	North Carolina Growers Association (NCGA)	4,441	4.0%
	Washington Farm Labor Association (WAFLA)	2,651	2.4%
	Fresh Harvest, Inc.	2,453	2.2%
	Elkhorn Packing Co., LLC	2,053	1.8%
	Zirkle Fruit Company	1,863	1.7%
	Foothill Packing, Inc.	1,624	1.4%
	Farm Op, Inc.	957	0.9%
	Virginia Agricultural Growers Assoc. (VAGA)	925	0.8%
	A. Oseguera Company, Inc.	891	0.8%
	Hamilton Growers, Inc.	833	0.7%
Top 10 Crops/Occupations	Berries ³	12,418	11.1%
	General Farm Workers	9,802	8.7%
	Lettuce ⁴	7,131	6.4%
	Nursery and Greenhouse Workers	6,119	5.5%
	Tobacco ⁵	5,859	5.2%
	Agricultural Equipment Operators ⁶	4,530	4.0%
	Fruits and Vegetables	4,368	3.9%
	Onions ⁷	4,098	3.7%
	Apples ⁸	3,951	3.5%
	Cherries ⁹	3,426	3.1%

Top States



Top Crops



¹Applications Received is derived from data not publicly disclosed.

²Percent of complete H-2A applications resolved 30 days before the start date of need. A complete H-2A application is defined as one containing all the documentation (e.g., housing inspection report, workers' compensation, recruitment report) necessary for the OFLC Certifying Officer to issue a final determination 30 days before the start date of need.

³Berries Category includes listed Primary Crops of Berries, Blackberries, Blueberries, Raspberries and Strawberries.

⁴Lettuce Category includes listed Primary Crops of Iceberg, Lettuce and Romaine.

⁵Tobacco Category includes Primary Crops of Burley as well as Cutleaf, Flue-Cured, Selfing, and Stripping Tobacco.

⁶Agricultural Equipment Operators Category includes Primary Crops of Agricultural Equipment Operators, Custom Combines and Logging.

⁷Onions Category includes listed Primary Crops of Onions, Sweet Onions, and Vidalia Onions.

⁸Apples Category includes Primary Crop of Apple Drops.

⁹Cherries Category includes listed Primary Crops of Cherries, Sweet Cherries and Yellow Cherries.