



Managing Labor Challenges: Joe Rasch Orchards

Use of H-2A

- 10 years: Same workers continue to return year after year.
- Need for program across farm has expanded as domestic labor availability has decreased.

10-Year Program Comparison (Michigan)

2014	2024
Wage: \$11.49	Wage: \$18.50 (61% increase)
MI Minimum Wage: \$8.15	MI Minimum Wage: \$10.33 (27% increase)
AEWR>Min. Wage: 40%	AEWR>Min. Wage: 80%
Total Visas Issued (US): 89,274 ¹	'24 Certified Positions (US): 384,900 ² (331% increase) ³

Guestworker Programs: Inherent Challenges

- Language barriers in many cases
- Workforce's adjustment to living in a different country
- Coordination – international recruitment, travel

¹ <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R44849>

² U.S. Department of Labor, ETA, OFLC – Performance Data: Selected Statistics
<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/foreign-labor/performance>

³ Actual visas issued may be slightly lower than certified positions but is the most current statistic available for 2024.



Specific H-2A Challenges

- Wage rate
 - Unpredictable, unrelated to actual business income
- Unpredictability of farming is not reflected in flexibilities allowed
- Administrative costs & burdens
 - Redundancy, costs to cover unrelated programs
- Regulatory changes

Farm Actions

- Investment in team, bilingual capabilities
- Spend time reviewing requirements and job needs
- Maintain relationship with legal counsel
- Utilize technology

Advocating for Change

- Tell positive stories: visits to DC, invitations to visit farm
 - Life-changing role of the program for workers
 - Relationship between farm and communities
- Inform of reality:
 - Farm should not have to do more with less to produce food and survive
 - Paying Price:
 - US Workers – farmers, year-round staff, paying price for broken system. Less income to invest in making jobs easier, unable to hire more staff
 - US Consumers – inevitable higher prices, less domestic food production

Involvement in Advocacy Groups

- **USApple:** usapple.org
- **Michigan Farm Bureau:** www.michfb.com
- **Find State Farm Bureau:** www.fb.org/about/get-involved
- **National Council of Ag Employers:** www.ncaeonline.org

*kvargas@joeraschorchards.com
www.joeraschorchards.com*