

Statement by Bob Stallman, President, American Farm Bureau Federation, Regarding Final H2A Rule

WASHINGTON, D.C, February 12, 2010 – “The American Farm Bureau Federation is extremely disappointed at the changes to the H-2A program temporary worker program announced today by the Labor Department. The new program will be the most difficult ever for agricultural employers to administer. It also comes at a critical time of economic uncertainty and undoes a number of improvements implemented by the department only a year ago.

“There continues to be a labor shortage in U.S. agriculture and agricultural employers need an efficient, affordable temporary worker program to help put food on Americans’ tables. Even with the slower economy, farm labor remains physically demanding, periodic, all-weather work and it is often impossible for farmers and ranchers to find the workers they need.

“It is the right policy of the United States to require that only those who are legally eligible to work in this country should be given U.S. jobs. But since there haven’t been, for several years, enough legal workers in the U.S. to meet the demand of U.S. agricultural employers, it is the responsibility of the administration and Congress to authorize a useful program that enables capable, dependable and willing employees to come to the U.S. temporarily to do the jobs that domestic workers don’t want.

“This final H-2A rule will only compound existing labor shortages. It is not the program needed by America’s farmers and ranchers. By finalizing this rule the administration has failed U.S. agricultural employers. Its claims of needed worker protections as justification for the new rule are unfounded and an affront to America’s farmers and ranchers.

“The ball is now in the court of the Congress to do what the administration has failed to do: to create a meaningful guest worker program that works fairly and honorably for employers and employees alike, thereby encouraging economic growth and more new jobs in an industry that is essential to nourishing a growing world population.”