

The Honorable David Pekoske  
Acting Secretary of Homeland Security  
Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable Antony Blinken  
Secretary of State  
2201 C St., NW  
Washington, DC 20520

January 28, 2021

Dear Secretary Blinken and Acting Secretary Pekoske:

The American Farm Bureau Federation appreciates your efforts to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and address concerns regarding new strains of the coronavirus. Our members are committed to ensuring the stability of our food, fuel and fiber supply while also mitigating the spread of COVID-19 among our essential agricultural workers.

The Biden Administration's recent "Proclamation on the Suspension of Entry as Immigrants and Non-Immigrants of Certain Additional Persons Who Pose a Risk of Transmitting Coronavirus Disease" limits the travel of noncitizens from several countries including South Africa to the United States.

Due to ongoing workforce shortages, American farmers use the H-2A guestworker visa program to fill vacant farm positions. The most recent available data indicates that approximately 5,000 of these valued essential workers originate from South Africa. Many of these South African H-2A workers have a unique skillset, and American farmers are counting on their timely arrival as they make plans for their upcoming growing seasons.

I write today to request that H-2A workers coming to the United States be exempted from the proclamation under the provision in Section 2(B)(xii) which allows the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Homeland Security, or their designees to exempt noncitizens from the travel restrictions whose entry would be in the national interest. This request is bolstered by the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency designation of food and agricultural workers as essential during the pandemic.

While protecting our nation from new strains of COVID-19 is critically important, it is in our national interest to ensure production of food, fuel, and fiber. While AFBF remains committed to reducing the spread of COVID-19, farmers, H-2A workers, the Department of Homeland Security, and State Department can work together to allow workers taking appropriate health and safety precautions to travel to the United States. AFBF appreciates your consideration of this request and stands ready to assist the Biden Administration in developing a procedure to exempt H-2A workers from the travel limitations described in the "Proclamation on the Suspension of Entry as Immigrants and Non-Immigrants of Certain Additional Persons Who Pose a Risk of Transmitting Coronavirus Disease."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Zippy Duvall". The signature is fluid and elegant, with the first name "Zippy" written in a larger, more prominent hand than the last name "Duvall".

Zippy Duvall  
President

cc Acting Secretary of Agriculture Kevin Shea