



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES
COMMISSIONER NICOLE "NIKKI" FRIED
THE CAPITOL

May 27, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I write to you today as Florida's Commissioner of Agriculture on behalf of our state's forest industry to request you continue to recognize the importance of maintaining H-2B visa processing that provides the nonimmigrant labor this essential industry needs to remain productive.

Agriculture is Florida's second largest industry and first in times of economic downturns, such as during the current COVID-19 pandemic. Florida's 47,000 farms support two million jobs and \$137 billion in economic impact. Forestry is Florida's largest agricultural commodity, which has faced many global challenges in the past few years.

In October 2018, Hurricane Michael struck Florida's Panhandle, devastating its timber industry that is the region's leading agricultural sector and a major driver of jobs in the impacted communities. More than 19 months later, our forest landowners are still awaiting USDA assistance to help recover from the \$1.3 billion in losses caused by the storm that felled 72 million tons of trees. Additionally, Florida saw a 66 percent decline in key timber exports to China in 2019 due to retaliatory tariffs, further damaging this critical American industry. We cannot afford to add labor uncertainty on top of the challenges our forest industry is already facing.

Our proud forest landowners are resilient. They are still producing and contributing greatly to our state's and nation's economy during these unprecedented times, with forestry having been recognized as an essential business during COVID-19 in guidance issued by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. H-2B seasonal guestworkers are critical for these operations to continue undisrupted, with the forest industry the second largest user of this visa program, and the State of Florida second in the nation for H-2B hiring.

As your administration responds to the COVID-19 pandemic, I urge you to continue putting American farmers first, continue recognizing forestry as essential, and continue protecting this vital industry's access to the H-2B visa program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "nicole fried". The signature is written in a cursive, lowercase style.

Nicole Fried
Commissioner of Agriculture



**U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services**

June 9, 2020

Nicole Fried
Commissioner of Agriculture
Florida Department of Agriculture
and Consumer Services
The Capitol
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0800

Dear Ms. Fried:

Thank you for your May 27, 2020 letter to President Trump regarding continued access to the H-2B visa program for Florida's forest industry. The Department of Homeland Security was asked to respond on behalf of the President.

In your letter, you stated that continued access to H-2B nonimmigrant labor is essential for the forest industry in Florida, particularly during the current challenges of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. You also noted that the industry has dealt with several difficulties in recent years, including Hurricane Michael in October 2018, and you have concerns that any labor uncertainty brought on by the public health emergency will only lead to worse outcomes for the forest industry.

The Department appreciates the concerns you raise regarding the need for H-2B nonimmigrant labor for the forest industry in Florida. We also recognize this industry is critical to Florida's, as well as the nation's, economy. Please rest assured that the Department remains committed to protecting U.S. workers and businesses, while strengthening and lawfully administering our nation's immigration system. We continue to monitor the rapidly evolving circumstances surrounding the public health emergency and will continue to assess the steps needed to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic.

Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important issue.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Edlow", followed by a horizontal line.

Joseph Edlow
Deputy Director for Policy