

**Western Iowa Dairy Alliance
Position Statement**

Adopted by WIDA Board, 12/14/2015

Labor and Immigration

Dairy farmers face a critical shortage of workers every year, as citizens are largely unwilling to engage in these rigorous activities and guest worker programs are unable to respond to the marketplace. This situation makes our farms less competitive with foreign farmers and less reliable for the American consumer. Securing a reliable and competent workforce for our nation's farms is essential to agriculture and the U.S. economy.

We believe the following points are fundamental in any discussion about labor and immigration policy:

- **Federal Responsibility:** Immigration policy is a federal issue between the U.S. Government and other countries. We urge the Iowa congressional delegation to work to enact immigration policy at the federal level that improves our immigration system, keeps our communities safe, and protects our borders.
- **Strengthening Our Economy:** Iowa is best served by a free-market philosophy that maximizes individual freedom and opportunity. Our immigration system must be flexible enough to address the needs of businesses while protecting the interests of workers. This includes a guest worker system that is both responsive and effective at meeting the demands of our economy. It should also acknowledge the beneficial economic contributions immigrants make as workers, taxpayers, and consumers. The loss of immigrant workers would cost the U.S. economy an estimated \$32 billion and nearly double retail milk prices according to a National Milk Producers Federation report released in September 2015¹. This disruption in the food supply would cause a ripple effect through the economy. In addition, most western Iowa dairy farmers pay employees well above minimum wage and provide competitive benefits packages to allow all workers to provide a good living for themselves and their families.
- **Ensuring Our National Security:** We believe that maintaining the safety and security of the United States is an utmost priority. Our immigration system must ensure the protection of our communities and national borders.
- **Supporting Immigrant Families and Individual Rights:** Strong families are critical to developing successful individuals and cohesive communities. Our immigration policies, where possible, should prioritize keeping close families together in order to ensure the most supportive home environments for all children across our state. We also recognize that the current lack of consistent and comprehensive legislation or guest worker program opens the doors for immigrants to be targets of costly schemes or individuals that can take advantage of the immigrant's situation and desire to become a citizen.
- **Effective Enforcement:** We support a law enforcement strategy that focuses on public safety, targets serious crime, and safeguards witnesses and victims. We further urge a reasonable and predictable regulatory environment that considers the interest of, and unintended consequences to businesses, workers, and consumers. Furthermore, the broader reform effort should eventually include a way to accurately, reliably, and affordably determine who is permitted to work, ensuring an adequate labor force for a growing economy.
- **A Common Sense Approach:** Immigrants are part of our communities across Iowa. We must adopt a commonsense approach to this reality that reflects our values and recognizes the critical role immigration has played in our nation's history and economy. Our immigration policies must provide a sensible path forward for immigrants who are here without legal status, are of good character, pay taxes, and are committed to becoming fully participating members of our society and culture.
- **Animal Well-Being:** Providing the best possible care for animals is the top priority for dairy farmers. Without a stable labor force, the well-being of these animals could be compromised due to fewer workers to feed and monitor animals, as well as decreased farm income to provide adequate feed and other care.

WIDA supports efforts that bring together leaders and community members of diverse backgrounds and politics who are committed to fostering a more rational and collaborative approach to immigration policy than exists today; and will seek our member's input in the development of any legislation directed at addressing Immigration reform.

As a member of Iowa State Dairy Association, National Milk Producers Federation, and American Dairy Coalition, we will work through those existing organizations to provide input on and provide support for specific immigration policies or programs that we believe will be beneficial to Iowa dairy farmers and the dairy community.

¹ National Milk Producers Federation, September 2015, http://www.nmpf.org/washington_watch/immigration