

The Inherent Tension Between Design and Practice in the H-2A Guestworker Visa Program

Elinor R. Jordan

Occasional Paper No. 74

May 2012

ABSTRACT

When formulating farm and immigration policy for the nation, it is vital that lawmakers consider the long-term consequences of the programs they put into place. The H-2A visa program has served to bring numerous temporary workers to the United States to work in agriculture, but at very high cost. This article chronicles the experiences of many farmworker advocates regarding a pattern of exclusion of U.S. workers by employers, who seemingly prefer H-2A workers. The article further argues that, particularly in states like Michigan, where a large percentage of seasonal farmworkers travel with their families, over-utilization of the H-2A program could undercut efforts to improve labor conditions and strengthen the fabric of farm communities.