

## Land Stewardship Project Statement on Immigration Reform: Abuse of our Agricultural Workforce Must End

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In the past month comprehensive federal immigration reform has risen to the forefront as policymakers in the U.S. Senate and President Barack Obama discuss options and proposals that are expected to move through the lawmaking process in the coming year.

For far too long this debate has been stifled. We commend leaders for finally moving forward on this challenging issue.

Millions of Americans believe our nation's current immigration system is inconsistent, woefully inadequate, and in need of reform. The Land Stewardship Project believes reform to our broken immigration policy is needed.

The Land Stewardship Project's mission is to foster an ethic of stewardship for farmland, promote sustainable agriculture and develop sustainable communities. We fundamentally cannot have a sustainable food and farming system unless that system is economically, racially and socially just.

Current immigration policy:

- **Enables large-scale corporate-backed factory farms to suppress portions of the workforce.** The proliferation of factory farms has been assisted in part by cheap labor and a repressed workforce. It is often a workforce of immigrants or "undocumented" workers employed at these facilities. In recent years, "wage theft" and labor violations endured by immigrant workers have been reported at facilities in the Upper Midwest. This behavior is illegal and immoral, but persists because a workforce of new immigrants often fears retaliatory measures that can include the threat of deportation. Immigration reform can help rectify this dynamic that allows for workforce abuse on factory farms.
- **Impedes the building of sustainable communities.** At the Land Stewardship Project we have long sought to increase the number of farmers in rural communities. Many immigrants come from farming backgrounds and some are interested in farming in the U.S. Yet, when faced with the insecurity of being "undocumented," individuals are unwilling to invest the time, energy and finances needed to successfully launch a farming enterprise. This dynamic is not healthy for rural communities.
- **Does not provide a legitimate means for farmworkers to gain employment in agricultural related jobs.** The U.S. currently does not have an adequate agricultural workforce to meet labor needs, especially in the fruit and produce sectors. While these jobs should be accessible to current American citizens, a clear option for non-resident farmworkers that is legal and fair is also needed. It will provide more resilience and

consistency in agriculture for farms and farmworkers. The 10,000<sup>1</sup> work visas currently available on an annual basis are insufficient and drive individuals to enter the country illegally. This problem needs to be addressed in any immigration reform package.

- **Has not acknowledged and rectified the adverse impacts of trade agreements.** The influx of immigrants from Latin America in the past 15 years is closely related to the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994. This trade policy works against the interests of family farms in the U.S., as well as in Mexico, where two million Mexican farms subsequently went out of business due in part to the influx of cheap (and subsidized) U.S. grain. Many of these Latin American farmers immigrated in search of work but immigration policy has not been adequate in recognizing this dynamic.

The Land Stewardship will continue to monitor and track the immigration reform proposals in the coming year. If you have question or concerns, contact the Land Stewardship Project's Doug Nopar at 507-523-3366.

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<sup>1</sup>Congressional Research Service: Numerical Limits on Employment-Based Immigration: Analysis of the Per-Country Ceilings. December 6, 2011. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/homesec/R42048.pdf>