

POLICY ISSUE BRIEF

WHY FRA SUPPORTS H-2B REFORM



BACKGROUND

The forestry sector depends on seasonal H-2B visa workers when there aren't enough U.S. workers for short-term, remote jobs. The program is tightly regulated, with an annual cap of 66,000 visas—representing less than 0.1% of total U.S. employment. Despite its limited scale, H-2B labor plays an outsized role in sustaining rural economies and ensuring continuity in seasonal operations.

For FRA and its members, the program is especially relevant to seasonal forestry work such as reforestation, wildfire mitigation, and timber stand improvement. Only around 2% of eligible H-2B forestry jobs are filled by U.S. workers. Between 2018 and 2023, the number of counties that had certified H-2B workers increased by 30.4 percent. In 2023, businesses in 469 U.S. counties had gained certified H-2B workers that did not have them in 2018—further highlighting the growing reach and reliance on the program.

A 2025 Edgeworth Economics study confirms:

- No negative impact on U.S. wages or job opportunities from H-2B use.
- Each H-2B worker supports 3–5 U.S. jobs.
- Areas with more H-2B workers saw 1.6% higher wage growth.
- H-2B fills seasonal, remote, and physically demanding jobs that Americans don't take.
- Employers must undergo a rigorous labor market test to demonstrate that no qualified U.S. workers are available before hiring H-2B labor.
- H-2B is a supplement, not a substitute, for domestic labor.

REQUESTS



Exempt forestry workers from the H-2B cap to address the multiyear reforestation backlog.



Support an H-2B Certified Seasonal Employer Exemption in FY 2026 DHS appropriations or spending bills.



Establish permanent H-2B cap relief.

WHY MORE H-2B VISAS ARE NEEDED

- There is currently a 3–5-year backlog and 7 million USDA Forest Service acres awaiting replanting.
- Seasonal workers plant 85% of U.S. trees each year — about 1.5 billion trees on 2.2 million acres.
- Timely access to H-2B visas is essential for hiring seasonal workers.
- 60% of forestry employers expect labor needs to grow within three years, yet 73% say visa shortages will impact reforestation efforts.

ABOUT FRA

The Forest Resources Association (FRA) is the only national organization representing all sectors of the wood supply chain. It advocates for its members on federal policy, supply chain relations, and forest operations. FRA members are represented in 49 states and 384 congressional districts.

For more information, please contact:

Tim O'Hara, FRA President, 218-390-7965 or tohara@forestresources.org