

## Agri chief touts immig bill to help economy, farmers

Written by Administrator  
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**U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack says immigration reform will give the agricultural workers certainty and sustainability in the area of labor.**

PHILADELPHIA — The Obama Administration is engaging in a full court press to try to get the immigration bill, which has already passed the Senate, through the House.

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack touted the advantages of the immigration bill for the agricultural sector in Pennsylvania, as well as the economy as a whole.

“I think there’s a pretty good reason most Americans are supporting this,” said Vilsack.

“We all like to eat.”

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The immigration bill [S-744] would keep food affordable by helping farmers with a dependable workforce, he said.

Currently, the lack of certainty in the supply of farm workers has American farmers planting fewer crops, he said.

And that's making us less competitive, said Vilsack, who is just back from a trip to Brazil.

Brazil, he said, has pulled ahead of the U.S this year as the number one exporter of soybeans.

"America cannot afford to stand still on agriculture," said Vilsack.

"We can't take for granted we are on the top of the pile."

"What fixing the immigration system would mean, bottom line, is a stable and secure work force," he said.

It would increase income and "grow jobs in rural areas and across the entire economy," he said.

The bill also includes provisions to beef up security at the border, he noted.

The immigration bill would also reduce the deficit by \$850 billion over the next 20 years, Vilsack said.

"The economy grows, people come out of the shadows, it reduces the deficit and shores up the Social Security system," said Vilsack, about what would happen if the bill becomes law.

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“It’s hard to see any down side of this.”

In Pennsylvania, nearly 20 percent of farm laborers on the state’s 163 farms are undocumented, he said.

Pennsylvania farmers sell \$5.8 billion in agricultural products.

According to one study, an expanded temporary worker program, such as the one in the Senate bill, would mean 1,190 new jobs in the state.

And benefits of tourism would also increase, according to the USDA.

Pennsylvania had 926,000 visitors from abroad in 2011.

While Sen. Bob Casey, [D] voted for the immigration bill, Sen. Pat Toomey [R] opposed it.

“I voted against this legislation because it failed to fix our immigration system,” Toomey said.

“Among other things, the bill would guarantee the next wave of illegal immigration by failing to provide adequate legal avenues for those who want to come here.”

Toomey also faulted Majority Leader Sen. Harry Reid [D-Nev.] for refusing to allow amendments to the bill that Toomey said would improve it, including Toomey’s proposal to increase guest workers.