



Hollabaugh Brothers, Inc. Fruit Farms & Market

Dear Editor,

I've been following the recent hype about the immigration issue and would like to share my view. Our family has farmed along Route 34 north of Biglerville since 1955. I joined the family business via marriage over 30 years ago, and left a job in the medical field to raise our children on the farm so I could be more present in their lives, and in our business. I do not regret that decision for an instant.

Our two children and a nephew have chosen to return to our business upon graduation from college. They might have opted for professions in which they could have made a lot more money, and worked a lot less hard. But they were raised to value the land and they wished to become stewards of that land. I am very proud of them and I hope that they can pass our farm on to the next generation. But I'm very troubled right now about our capability to maintain our business as an agricultural enterprise.

I've watched a lot of changes in the labor market over the years as an employer of anywhere from 5 to 50 seasonal workers depending upon the time of year. There was a day that a team of high school students joined our migratory crew to help us thin fruit during the late spring, and then harvesting some months later. Today, the few high school applicants we receive request work at our farm market. In an interview situation, I will often ask them if they are willing to mow, or thin, or pick fruit if work would not be available at the market. In almost every case, they respond that they are not looking for "that kind of work". And indeed, the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) makes it nearly impossible to put a teenager to work today like they could work years ago. That is a sad statement, but nonetheless, truthful. There are so many rules and regulations anymore that it is often more hassle to hire a teenager than it's worth. I regret making that statement, as educating some of our teenage employees over the years has brought me a great deal of delight and pride. They come with zero interest or knowledge about the produce world, and leave for college several years later with a new found appreciation for agriculture and what a farmer really does. Unfortunately, our Federal government deems it better for 14 and 15 and 16 year olds to "not work so hard". I beg to differ.

There also is a huge misconception that those of us in agriculture willingly hire "illegals". We do not. When we look to hire *any* new employee, there are certain documents that are required by law. We will not hire anyone without that documentation. Thus far, we have not been required to become "police" to determine if the paperwork is authentic. However, whether legal or not, I must stress that there are NOT domestic workers willing OR able to do the work that our fine team of Hispanic and Haitian workers do. They are simply not out there based upon our repeated efforts with job services.

The idea of hiring prisoners or those on welfare to harvest our crops, while in theory might sound like a good solution, in reality is not. The work that our employees do for us is skilled labor. They work long, hard hours and are VERY good at what they do. It requires a certain skill set to know how to train a tree by pruning, or to know which peach is mature and ready to harvest and which is not. Domestic workers looking for a job generally have no experience with tree fruits and horticultural practices. And while

we would be willing to train a new employee, domestic workers do not wish to work the hours required in the outside environment.

Then there's the often-mentioned point that agricultural employers use immigrant labor because it is cheap labor – taking work away from domestic workers because we do not want to pay anything for the work. Nothing could be farther from the truth. All of our farm workers make more than minimum wage, and when we are working “by the piece”, it is not unusual for our workers to make over \$14 an hour! These are very skilled laborers who are very good at what they do – and they are paid accordingly!

Also, to dispute yet another misconception, agricultural migrant laborers pay the very same taxes that all of the rest of us do who live and work in the U.S. Our tax base is supported by our immigrant work force!

My parents grew up during the depression. I recall my dad talking about bread lines. I was raised to be appreciative of the bountiful food we have in the United States. Our food is safe and nutritious and abundant. It saddens me to think that so many of our farms no longer exist here in Adams County. But most often that is simply because there is no “next generation” to carry on the work of farming. I believe it would be simply tragic to think that our farms would cease to exist because we could no longer hire anyone to do the work required to stay in business. If there are those folks who believe we have expensive, unsafe food *now*, wait until they see what it will be like when all of our food is imported from Chile, or China or Guatemala. I have a feeling the bread lines of the 1940's would pale in comparison to what could potentially happen in the 2000's. I hope I don't live to see that day.

Our farm market has been vandalized two times in the past month. Recently we were awakened to a phone call at 3:30 a.m. from County Control. Stacks of bins had been set on fire at one of our loading areas. Those 250 plus bins were made of oak from our farm and were constructed by our workers. They are irreplaceable.

I'm not asking for pity or sympathy, but rather perhaps just a bit of empathy. Congress cannot control criminal acts of vandalism or arson. They can, however, step to the plate and start to seriously look at the labor issues we have within our country. Fixing the mess we're in is not easy, but I'm very fearful of what is to happen if our elected officials in Washington don't soon realize the potential harm to this country. Each voter has placed these elected officials in Washington. If you're wondering what you can possibly do to fix this mess, at the very least – call and voice your concern to your Congressman or woman!

For us in our business, there is a lot at stake. Hollabaugh Bros. cannot and will not be able to continue to produce nearly 500 acres of fruits and vegetables if there's no one here to harvest them. If you don't believe anything else that I have written, please believe that.

- Kay Hollabaugh