



Letter of Support

DATE: May 4, 2009

TO: Members of the North Carolina General Assembl

FR: Mel Ray, President

RE: AgRELIEF Act

On behalf of the Tobacco Growers Association of North Carolina I am writing to you today to express support for the AgRELIEF Act that has been proposed in the House (HB 1364) and Senate (S.881).

As I am sure you understand, an affordable, reliable and legal guest worker program is critical to our ability to manage all aspects of our labor intensive commodity. The proposed legislation will help sure up the ability for our farmers to be able to continue to rely on those much needed temporary workers through the federal H-2A Guest Worker Program.

The current Guest Worker Program is becoming cost prohibitive in some regards. Efforts to achieve corrections are being sought at the federal level in areas such as the Adverse Effect Wage Rate which requires wages much higher than the prevailing wage rate in North Carolina. However, relief is needed asap.

The North Carolina AgRELIEF act would cover, for reimbursement, of up to 50% of the up-front expenses paid by farmers for each worker including up to \$300 for all transportation and subsistence costs for workers; up to \$325 for all processing charges and administrative fees and dues; any state department visa fees and border patrol crossing fees; and any US consulate application and appointment fees.

The AgRELIEF act would require farmers to provide documentation for approved housing, workers' compensation insurance for workers, proof of insurance for vehicles transporting workers, pesticide training, compliance with all federal requirements to ensure no legally authorized US worker is available, able and willing, and a valid H-2A visa.

All of this support will assist farmers who are already bearing the high expense to use legal, temporary farm workers; and hopefully will encourage other farmers who have been resistant to using the program due to the high up-front expense to re-examine the program.

Thank you in advance for your leadership and support on this valuable effort.