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Senator Brubaker,

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to share my concerns with the committee about the future of the mushroom industry's labor pool.

As you know, the mushroom industry is the largest vegetable cash crop in the Commonwealth. In 2006, over 60 percent of the US production was from Pennsylvania. Last year approximately 500 million pounds of different varieties of mushrooms were grown in the Commonwealth with a value approaching \$450 million dollars.

Mushroom farms in Pennsylvania offer starting wages that are usually higher than minimum wage, and some farms offer health insurance, retirement plans, and other benefits.

Since mushroom farms operate year-round, the workers are not seasonal. The numbers of non-management workers are as follows:

Growing operations:	5,500 (76 farms)
Packing operations:	1,500
Processing:	500
Transportation:	250 (most is contracted out)
Management:	750
Total employment:	8,500

Today, because of the decline in housing starts, labor availability isn't much of an issue, but it was a year ago and will be again. The industry is very labor intensive, and the future of the industry will depend largely on immigration reform. Some of the reform implications for the industry are:

1. National estimates are that up to 70 percent of the current agricultural workforce does not have proper documentation. Aside from being impractical, forcing these trained workers to leave the country would force farms to shut down since there are not available replacement workers.

2. With new packaging and cooling technology, fresh mushrooms are shipped daily from Pennsylvania to California. There is no impediment to fresh mushrooms being shipped from Mexico to Pennsylvania. Without an adequate labor force, production will definitely move to where workers can be found, most likely outside the United States.
3. The mushroom farm community extends to companies that provide services (food safety testing), equipment (forklifts), supplies (spawn, gloves, and harvesting baskets), technology (computer systems to control growing room temperatures), transportation and many other products. Without the labor force to pick mushrooms, there will be no need for these ancillary businesses or their employees.
4. Without mushroom composting, hay farmers in Pennsylvania would see their markets shrink. Mushroom composters also process a number of agricultural by-products – horse manure, chicken litter, cottonseed hulls, cocoa shells – to make a nutrient-dense growing medium that can be used as a soil amendment after the mushroom growing process. Without an outlet for these by-products, other agricultural producers would face serious environmental and disposal problems.

Several years ago, 30 mushroom growers in Chester and Berks Counties formed a company with the sole purpose of applying for H2-A workers. After filing the required documents, we were told by an official with The United States Department of Labor, that because we operate year-round we don't qualify for the program, even though the industry is regulated under a seasonal stature, the Migrant Workers Seasonal Protection Act (MSWPA). A legal, stable and affordable workforce is needed year-round. Under the current H2-A program, mushroom farms are ineligible due to the seasonality requirements. Any agricultural guest worker program must allow for year-round employment.

Anything that the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania can do to help insure a stable workforce will benefit all agricultural enterprises.