

From the NFU Government Relations team

As more details about the Coronavirus Aid, Response, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) become available, NFU will share additional information and summaries. Furthermore, government agencies and industry groups continue to respond to the crisis and NFU will keep you advised of the latest developments. Please reach out to NFU staff with any questions and visit [www.nfu.org/covid-19](http://www.nfu.org/covid-19) to see some of our latest actions and resources.

### **Rural health**

Linked below is a summary of rural health provisions in the CARES Act, as compiled Senate Finance Committee.

<https://www.finance.senate.gov/chairmans-news/rural-resources-in-the-coronavirus-aid-relief-and-economic-security-cares-act>

Questions have arisen about what can be done if a farm family no longer has health insurance coverage due to a family member losing an off-farm job. Healthcare.gov offers an FAQ section that can answer many of these questions. To learn more, visit: <https://www.healthcare.gov/self-employed/coverage/>

### **Ag labor**

USDA provided an update on Thursday, March 26 regarding H-2A visa processing disruptions. It announced that the State Department took additional steps on March 26 to increase processing of H-2A visa holders through consulates around the world. Details include:

- The Department of State and DHS have authorized consular offices to expand the categories of H-2A visa applicants whose applications can be adjudicated without an in-person interview
- Consular officers, at their discretion, can waive the visas interview requirement for first-time *and* returning H-2A applicants who have “no potential ineligibility”
- Expansion of interview waiver eligibility for returning workers from 12 months to 48 months. Thus, applicants whose previous visas expired in the last 48 months, and who did not require a waiver of ineligibility the last time they applied, do not need to be interviewed in-person if they are applying for the same visas classification as their previous visa

Guidance can be found on <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/visas-news/important-announcement-on-h2-visas.htm> and is available at [www.farmers.gov/manage/h2a](http://www.farmers.gov/manage/h2a).

This update is related to US Consular activities. If other countries have travel restrictions or lock down policies in place, Embassies will generally operate by that local guidance. Thus, this update on H-2A does not ensure successful processing of visas. USDA has encouraged stakeholders to monitor Embassy webpages for the most up to date information for each country where you might be seeking H-2A workers.

USDA continues to accept labor related questions at [aglabor@usda.gov](mailto:aglabor@usda.gov).

### **Food service preparedness guidelines**

The Food and Beverage Issue Alliance published guidelines and best practices for businesses in the food supply chain to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and respond if employees test positive for COVID-19. These resources are applicable to many farms and can be accessed here:

<https://www.feedingus.org/>