



February 11, 2026

For Immediate Release

Contact: John Hollay, President and CEO
(202) 629-9320

**NCAE Annual Meeting Tackles Urgent Ag Workforce
Regulations; Highlights Collaboration with Federal Agencies**

Arlington, VA – Amidst a rapidly shifting regulatory environment for American agriculture, the National Council of Agricultural Employers (NCAE) is convening its 2026 Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C. The three-day event has drawn farmers, ranchers, growers, agents and industry leaders from across the country to address the pressing regulatory complexities with which agricultural employers must contend.

The conference opened Wednesday with a keynote address from U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Deputy Secretary Stephen Vaden. Secretary Vaden outlined the Trump Administration's strategic initiatives designed to provide immediate relief to the agricultural sector including Farmer Bridge Assistance Program payments, the importance of specialty crop producers sharing data with USDA, and the need for organizations like NCAE to support the actions taken by the Trump Administration to support the agricultural community, such as the Department of Labor's Interim Final Rule related to the Adverse Effect Wage Rate.

"It is vital that organizations like [NCAE] be present in every stage of litigation, whether it be in the trial court, in appellate proceedings to come, and however far it goes...Thank you for putting the resources behind it—it's really going to make a difference that you were there to join with the Department of Labor and the Department of Justice, hand-in-glove with the Department of Agriculture to back up how important this rule is, and to talk about what the prior version of the rule meant to your operations, and how much a difference this new version of the rule will make, how it takes into account the economic reality of the expenses that federal law requires you to pay the legal workers you hire."

Wednesday was also punctuated by remarks from U.S. Rep. Dan Newhouse (WA-4) and Rep. Jim Costa (CA-21) which highlighted the vital intersection of federal policy and on-the-ground agricultural realities. After hearing from ag industry experts about what potential agricultural workforce reforms might look like, attendees adjourned on Wednesday to march on Capitol Hill to advocate for long-overdue ag workforce reforms.

Tuesday's technical sessions provided agricultural executives with critical analysis of the current regulatory framework with which employers must contend. The sessions began with "DOL IFR: Where Are We Now?", led by legal experts Kristi Boswell of Alston & Bird and Chris Schulte of Fisher Phillips. The session comes on the heels of NCAE's filing of an amicus curiae brief in support of the Department in *United Farm Workers, et al. v. U.S. Department of Labor*, a case challenging the Department's Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR).

The legal analysis was immediately followed by a deep dive into the "Economic Case for IFR," featuring insights from expert economists, Samantha Ayoub and Dr. Philip Martin with the American Farm Bureau Federation and the University of California, Davis respectively. These sessions underscored the industry's need for data-driven dialogue and clear regulatory guidance to ensure the sustainability of U.S. farming operations.

"Agricultural employers are facing one of the most complex labor landscapes in recent history, and clarity is essential for our survival," said

John Hollay, President & CEO of NCAE. "We are here in Washington not just to understand these new rules, but to engage directly with the agencies and lawmakers shaping them. Our goal is to foster a collaborative environment where policies support both the workforce and the farmers and growers who feed the nation."

On Tuesday, attendees also participated in targeted discussions on the current political landscape for the agricultural community, transportation challenges within the H-2A program, and received practical training on effective advocacy from legislative insiders. The day concluded with cross-sector perspectives from agricultural leaders from the dairy, mushroom, and vertical farm and greenhouse industries, providing a holistic approach to the agricultural community's shared challenges. The day's programming was further distinguished by remarks from U.S. Representative David Rouzer (NC-7), U.S. Representative Bill Huizenga (MI-4), and U.S. Representative Don Davis (NC-1), reinforcing the vital dialogue between agricultural employers and Capitol Hill.

About NCAE

Founded in 1964, NCAE is the only national association focusing exclusively on agricultural labor issues from the agricultural employer's viewpoint.