

California Women for Agriculture  
Santa Maria Chapter  
Legislative Task Force  
Ruth Jensen, Chair  
April, 2016



The election year campaigning has begun so you can expect that very little will be accomplished in congress. American Agri-Women will be participating in the annual Fly-In to Washington, DC June 5-8. The theme for the Symposium is "Rippling Effects of Aquifer Depletion" which will kick off the Fly-In. Meetings include a half day at EPA, USDA, an evening at the Embassy of Mexico, a Congressional Roundtable and a Military & Agriculture themed guided tour of the monuments. For more information log on to [www.americanagriwomen.org](http://www.americanagriwomen.org)

The Central Coast has seen considerable growth over the past 2 years of farmers procuring H2a Visa employees. Several farmers have purchased old motels and low income housing, completely renovated them to H2a OSHA standards, and are beginning to house H2a workers. Those areas were becoming blight and have really begun to spruce up and look attractive. Where you once saw more panhandlers, filth and unkempt area now all you see is neatly manicured lawns, flowers and a couple of busses. The low-income community is starting to fight this change.

Santa Barbara County Planning & Development is working on stream-lining the permit process for growers to build on their ag-zoned land. However, the Water Board won't issue permits for water or sewer. Farmers just can't move forward. Before any H2a Visa is approved, growers must prove that they have made efforts to hire locally, to Americans. All H2a Visa guest workers are strictly vetted, go through a rigorous health screening, may not bring family, may not obtain a drivers license or drive in the US and must pass a rigorous background check. He cannot have a ding on his record. If he is cited for any illegal conduct while he is a guest here, he is sent back and may not participate in the program again. Under the H2a Visa program, employer provided housing is a mandatory component. All of the specifications of the dwelling must be H2a compliant and go through a rigorous inspection by OSHA before the employees can be housed.

#### Other Item of Interest

Please be aware of this movement: The Ventura County Star published an Editorial titled "Oxnard Grower on right path to the better berry," that features Oxnard agribusiness, that recently became certified by the Equitable Food Initiative (EFI). (<http://www.equitablefood.org>) It states, "Over time, EFI certification will become the produce industry norm, helping to provide a "one-stop-shop" option for companies seeking assurance on working conditions, pesticide use and food safety protocols." National organizations and local organizations like CAUSE are pushing EFI stating it is the way to go when it comes to voluntary employer action to advance farmworker justice.