

Timeline of an Attempt to Change Agriculture Child-Labor Regulations

By Sarah Collinge

August 31, 2011 – The Department of Labor proposed new laws regulating child labor on corporate farms. The laws were meant to extend the legal protections already in place for non-farm workers to farm workers.

One reason for these proposed changes was to make working on large farms safer for children. The proposed laws prohibited:

- Children under 16 years of age from operating power-driven equipment.
- Children under 18 years of age from storing, marketing, and transporting raw materials.
- Children under 18 years of age from working in grain elevators, grain bins, silos, feed lots, stockyards, livestock exchanges, and livestock auctions.

According to the National Safety Council, agriculture is the second most dangerous occupation in the United States. These laws would help to protect children from life-threatening accidents related to farming.

Another reason for the proposed changes was to attempt to decrease the high school drop-out rate for children working on farms. In the United States today, one-third of children who work on farms never graduate from high school. New regulations could change this by:

- Changing the starting age for farm work from age 12 to age 14.
- Regulating the number of hours a day children under 15 can work. (3 hours on a school day, and 8 hours on a non-school day).

November 1, 2011 – After the White House reviewed the proposed laws, the public was allowed to share their concerns. Farming groups have remained opposed to the laws for many reasons.

First, many people in the farming industry believe children should be encouraged to do farm work because it teaches them the value of hard work and encourages children to pursue careers in agriculture. They worry restricting children's exposure to farming could threaten our future food supply.

Second, family farmers are concerned they will be restricted from passing their family's heritage and traditions on to their children. They believe parents should be able to control what their children do or do not do on the farm.

In fact, the proposed laws would not threaten family farms because parents can employ their own children with no restrictions.

April 26, 2012 – The Obama Administration made a decision to reject the proposed laws that would extend legal protections to farm workers. The Obama Administration declared a commitment to family farms and rural America.

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