

Mr. Jeffrey Zients
White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

February 22, 2022

Dear Mr. Zients:

The food, fiber, and plant supply chain understands the importance of taking precautions to curb the spread of COVID-19 and has worked proactively to protect essential workers throughout the supply chain. We continue to promote vaccination but have significant concerns with new border vaccination requirements and their impact on the food and agriculture supply chain.

New rules outlined in the U.S. Customs and Border Protection notice effective January 22 require all individuals, except U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents, to provide proof of a CDC-approved COVID-19 vaccination, as outlined on the [CDC website](#), when entering the United States through land ports of entry or ferry terminals. These new requirements have already begun to impact farmworkers and truckers whose work ensures stocked grocery and other retail stores.

Tasked with ensuring timely product delivery across borders and often carrying perishable commodities or crop production inputs, truck drivers ensure the supply chain has ample access to essential inputs for food, fuel, fiber and plant production. This new requirement has diminished the free flow of goods across land borders, worsening the existing truck driver shortage and significantly impacting the food supply chain.

While many farmworkers were vaccinated in the United States last year, some finished their essential work and returned to their home countries before vaccines were widely available in the United States. However, due to domestic worker shortages, we expect growth in guestworker programs in 2022. This means new H-2 workers who have not had the opportunity to work in the U.S. before or receive COVID vaccinations in this country will soon seek to cross the land border. We are deeply concerned that these new vaccination requirements are and will continue to delay worker arrivals, potentially leaving crops to rot in fields or go unplanted while farmers wait for farmworkers to become fully vaccinated so that they can legally cross the border. It is imperative the White House COVID-19 Response Team work in good faith with the agriculture industry to implement a more appropriate approach to COVID mitigation. In 2021, 37% of H-2A workers entered the United States between January and March; to delay – or potentially prevent – the arrival of one-third of this year’s agricultural workers would be devastating. It is critically important agricultural employees arrive without delay during this window for planting and harvesting.

Food and agricultural stakeholders are also concerned that many vaccines widely available in Mexico and Northern Triangle countries do not qualify under this requirement. Considering the

need to balance COVID precautions with the time-sensitive labor demands of food and agricultural production, we request that the COVID-19 Response Team provides flexibility for these employees coming to the United States. The Administration should permit employees to cross the borders and receive an approved vaccine in the United States as so many did last year. In the case of truck drivers, the COVID Response Team should explore other precautions to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, instead of continuing a policy that hampers the cross-border flow of goods.

While preventing the spread of COVID-19 continues to be critically important, it is also essential we do not exacerbate the current challenges in the food and agriculture supply chain with restrictive vaccination mandates that diminish worker access and slow the vital transportation of products essential to American food, fiber and plant production.

Sincerely,

Agricultural Retailers Association

American Cotton Producers

American Farm Bureau Federation

American Seed Trade Association

American Sugar Cane League

AmericanHort

International Fresh Produce Association

National Cattlemen's Beef Association

National Cotton Council

National Cotton Ginners Association

National Council of Farmer Cooperatives

National Grain and Feed Association

National Potato Council

U.S. Apple Association

USA Farmers

USA Rice

Western Growers

cc Alejandro Mayorkas, United States Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security
Thomas Vilsack, United States Secretary of Agriculture