

From: John Teeple

Resume: I'm a third generation apple grower. I have been growing apples full time for the past 36 years. I am a past president of the New York Apple Association and past president of the United States Apple Association. I have served on the North Rose Wolcott School Board as vice president. I am a life time member of the North Rose United Methodist Church. My wife and I have three grown daughters and three grandsons. We have always had an active interest in our community and industry.

To: Subcommittee on Regulatory Affairs, Stimulus Oversight, and Government Spending New York field hearing

Representative Ann Marie Buerkle (NY-25)

From: John Teeple

Subject: Testimony for the Oversight Field Hearing April 20, 2011 at the Irondequoit Town Hall

First, thank you for the opportunity to share with you some of the concerns of the apple industry.

My name is John Teeple; we are apple growers in Wayne county NY. We have been in business for over 50 years. We are also part owners of Lake Country Storage (an apple storage owned by 10 farms storing over 1.5 million bushels of apples), and Empire Fruit Growers Co Op (a fresh apple packing facility). I have also served on the board of NY Apple Growers Association, and I am currently on the board of US Apple Association.

I would like to focus on two issues today.

First, the need for a reliable, legal, labor force for agriculture.

Second, the need for continued funding of apple programs in the 2012 Farm Bill.

The apple industry is a world market. We ship apples all over the United States as well as export to other countries. If we are to keep the apple industry in New York State, we must remain competitive.

New York State needs approximately 8000 workers for about 8 weeks to harvest the apple crop of 30 million bushels. We need a unique labor force to harvest these apples:

They must be physically fit – apple picking is hard work.

They must be dependable and able to work 8 to 9 hours per day and 6 days per week. Apples are very time sensitive and must be picked at the proper time.

They must have the ability to spot pick apples for color and size and not burse them.

There are not many people that meet that criteria and are waiting for us to give them a job – and certainly not 8000. At the same time we are starting apple harvest, all of the other apple related businesses are also gearing up (packing lines, storages, processing plants like Motts). Most of our local people prefer these jobs as they are more long term (usually 40 to 45 weeks). So to meet our labor

needs, we have to attract a migrant worker from around the country. We do this by paying them well and giving them free housing. We pay by the piece rate – equated to hourly pay from \$10 to \$15 per hour, plus the value of free housing and utilities – worth another \$3 per hour. Much of the employment documentation we are given at the time of hiring turns out later to be inadequate. This puts us the employers in the position of having to terminate the employee and possibly face stiff fines.

Or, we have to use the off shore labor program H-2A. The H-2A program is administered by the US Department of Labor and is very expensive, cumbersome, restrictive as to the use of the workers, and unpredictable as to the timing of receiving workers.

We need agricultural labor reform in this country. Something like the AgJOBS bill that has been introduced in the past. We need a legal migratory work force that is willing and able to move to where the crops need to be harvested. We are quickly approaching a turning point, if we are not allowed to import labor to harvest our fruits and vegetable crops, these crops will move to other countries and we will have to import our food.

My second point:

Exports play a critical role in the economic vitality of the American apple industry. Promotion programs established under the Farm Bill help maintain and increase overseas apple sales. Under these programs, U.S. apple growers partner with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to increase consumption of U.S. apples overseas.

American apples are grown commercially in over 30 states. Our \$2.2 billion crop is produced on approximately 350,000 acres. U.S. apple exports reached almost \$800 million in 2009, or 40 percent of our total crop value. This means that over \$1 in every \$3 dollars in apple revenue comes from exports. Overseas apple sales are critical for our orchards and the entire apple industry. The market Access Program (MAP), the Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops Program and the Emerging Markets Program are part of the USDA's Farm Bill. The industry provides matching funds for the MAP program. These are good programs, vital to our industry. I would urge your support for these programs in the new Farm Bill.

I would be glad to answer any questions.