

LANDCASTER FARMING

Immigration and Ag Focus of Becker Forum

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LIVERPOOL, N.Y. — Want to learn more about immigration and its impact on agriculture? The 2011 Becker Forum offers a full day of educational sessions on labor issues.

The event will be held Tuesday, Jan. 25, at the Holiday Inn Syracuse in Liverpool in conjunction with the Empire State Fruit and Vegetable Expo & Farmers' Direct Marketing Conference.

“In recent years, we’ve focused on immigration because immigration policy is a very great concern to New York farm owners and managers,” said Thomas Maloney, a senior extension associate at Cornell University, which is a co-sponsor of the event. “We’ve had a great deal of uncertainty regarding labor supply, especially immigrant laborers. The industry is really asking us to pay attention to the issue.”

Maloney serves as the event coordinator. Charles Foster is slated to be the keynote speaker. As an attorney with FosterQuan, LLP, which operates offices in Rio Grande Valley, Mexico City and Washington, D.C., he has plenty of background on the topic.

“Charles was selected because in recent years, in the last couple Becker Forums, we’ve tried to focus on coalition building,” Maloney said. “He brings a unique approach to coalition building in that immigration can be a very politically partisan issue and he takes a bipartisan approach. He can help attendees think about how both parties can come together for workable immigration solutions.”

Foster’s bipartisanship is evidenced by his background, having served as senior policy adviser to both Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama during their presidential campaigns. He has also testified before both the U.S. House and Senate subcommittees on immigration.

“This year’s Becker Forum brings together a powerful group of policy makers on both the state and federal levels,” said Jeanette Marvin, New York State Vegetable Growers Association executive secretary.

The association co-hosts the event.

As any operator in New York knows, obtaining legal, competent farm workers represents one of the biggest challenges in agriculture today.

“It’s increasingly apparent that farmers can’t address the labor issue alone,” Maloney said. “It’s going to take a coalition-building effort, including bipartisan support. Charles Foster is very, very interested in supporting bipartisan support for comprehensive immigration reform.”

The event will include the politics of immigration reform and building coalitions; the new H-2A and other rules; compliance and enforcement; resources for farm workers; and Congress and immigration reform.

Maloney anticipates about 150 operators to attend.

“We are trying to keep as much information as possible in front of farm managers so they can work within the political process to get the kind of immigration reform that will be helpful for their businesses,” Maloney said.

Other speakers will include Frank Gasperini, executive vice president of the National Council of Agricultural Employers, Washington, D.C.; C.J. Lake, member of Monte Lake, Washington, D.C.; Mary Jo Dudley, director of Cornell Farmworker Program, Cornell University; Max Pfeiffer, senior associate of Cornell College of Agriculture and Life Sciences; Craig Regelbrugge, vice president of Government Relations and Research, American Nursery and Landscape Association, Washington, D.C.; Jorge Estrada, president of Leadership Coaching International, Graham, Wash.; and Maloney, senior extension associate, Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management, Cornell University.

The 2011 Empire State Fruit and Vegetable Expo and Direct Marketing Conference is sponsored by the New York State Vegetable Growers Association, Empire State Potato Growers, New York State Berry Growers Association, New York State Farmers’ Direct Marketing Association, New York State Horticultural Society, Cornell University and Cornell Cooperative Extension.

The Empire State Fruit and Vegetable Expo and Direct Marketing Conference will be held Jan. 26-27 at the Oncenter Convention Center in Syracuse.