

The Florida Times-Union: Farmers, restaurant owners say Georgia immigration law hurting business
By Walter Jones

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Georgia's law against illegal immigration is hurting restaurants and farmers by creating a labor shortage that results in lower sales, witnesses told a hearing Tuesday held by Senate Democrats.

Nearly three of every four eateries surveyed by the Georgia Restaurant Association complained that qualified workers weren't available, and 22 percent said applications for available jobs were down. Just 2 percent said they rely on the Department of Labor for new hires.

"People applying for jobs just aren't qualified," said Karen Bremer, executive director of the association of 16,000 restaurants.

As a result, many restaurant owners were closing off part of their dining rooms or taking items off their menus.

At the same time, farmers had 11,000 jobs they couldn't fill during the summer harvest, costing them \$150 million, according to a study conducted by the University of Georgia for the Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association.

"Georgia's fruit and vegetable economy has become the poster child of what can happen when you have a tough immigration law without an adequate guest-worker program," said association spokesman Charles Hall.

He favors expanding the federal guest-worker program to allow more migrant workers with less paperwork.

Paul Bridges, mayor of Uvalda near Vidalia, said farmers in his area who can't get immigrant laborers are switching from onions to crops that can be harvested by machine. However, those machine crops bring in less money, crippling the support businesses and tax base in his small town.

"It's destroying Georgia's economy," said Bridges, who is challenging the law's constitutionality in court.

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