

Testimony of Jim Alderman

Presenting before the US Senate Special Committee on Aging

Hearing on the Aging Farm Workforce Report

June 4, 2025

****2025 Aging Farm Workforce****

Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Gillibrand, and Members of this Committee, Good afternoon my name is Jim Alderman. I own and operate Alderman Farms in Boynton Beach Florida. I am proud to be a lifelong farmer and honored to represent Florida agriculture here today. I have the privilege of serving as the 2025 Florida Farm Bureau Federation farmer of the year. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about an issue that affects me personally, the aging of the American farm workforce.

I began Alderman Farms in 1979. We farm approximately 1200 acres in eastern Palm Beach County, Florida. We are a diversified farming operation, growing mixed organic vegetables and particularly vine, ripe tomatoes, the finest tomato you'll ever eat in the US. South Florida has a very unique climate which allows us to produce vegetables during the winter months, but it also brings unique challenges, hurricanes, invasive pests, development pressure, and rising input cost. You learn to adapt, you also learn that it is not a sprint, it's a lifelong commitment.

At the age of 78, I've spent almost 4 1/2 decades working the land. I still wake up before sunrise most days like many of my peers. I am still going strong because there's more work to be done. According to the committee's report, the average farmer is now 58 years old. In Florida, nearly 40% of our producers are 65 or older. We're proud of our experience and knowledge. But the question I ask is who is coming behind us? That's the part that keeps me up at night. It's just not growing crops. It's also passing down knowledge discipline in our way of life, but that chain of succession is breaking. Nationwide less than 9% of the farmers are under 35 years of age and then the numbers are even more sobering in states like mine. Young people want to farm but they're running into walls such as land being expensive. The equipment is even more expensive. The cost of

financing is very difficult.

The big question is why are farmers selling out, without young men and women stepping in? The incentive to make a profit is not there. We may ask why can't they make a profit. The first reason is that imports are being shipped into this country below our production costs. If a farmer cannot make money, he's not able to expand his operation. If he has the opportunity to sell his land to make money, then development comes in parking lots, residential communities, and no agriculture.

How can we help farmers make it so that we are competitive with our neighbors to the south and north? We have to be on the same level playing field.

Another problem farmers face is the invasion of invasive insects and diseases that come into our country from other countries.

For example, we have seen in Florida that citrus greening has devastated the citrus industry. We have gone from 240 million boxes of oranges in production to around 40 million boxes today, all because of an insect that came in with bacteria that causes citrus greening. I think that it would help our industry if we had better inspections in our ports of entry to combat the invasive insects and diseases that come into our country.

One of the other problems we have is that we are being over-regulated. Food safety is of primary concern for Alderman Farms. We are very careful to make sure that we have the safest produce coming from our farms. Presently, we have several food safety inspections. It would be great to have one inspection that would serve everyone.

Again, farmers must make a profit. They must make money to continue their operation, or they will take the easy way out and sell their property and retire. Free and equal trade between our neighboring countries is a must as you know labor is a major problem in agriculture. We are now dependent on H2A labor from Mexico because we cannot get enough domestic labor to harvest our crops. Agricultural labor reform is a must.

If we want to sustain agriculture in America, we need to smooth the path between generations, which means investing in beginning farmer programs,

expanding technical assistance, and offering incentives like estate planning support and make it easier to transfer farms without losing the land or the legacy. These aren't just policy tweaks, they are steps in our food system to prevent eroding one generation at a time.

So I come before you today not just as a farmer, but as someone who cares deeply about the future of the country's food supply. We need strong, bipartisan action to support aging farmers invest in new generations and keep American agriculture alive and well for decades to come.

Thank you for recognizing the urgency of this issue and thank you for giving farmers like me a voice.