



By Lauren Greer  
Senior Policy Analyst

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Every year the agriculture industry employs hundreds of thousands of Georgians and has a multi-billion dollar economic impact on the state. In 2009, food and fiber production and processing generated a total economic impact of nearly \$69 billion and accounted for more than 380,000 jobs in Georgia.<sup>1</sup> The most recent US Census of Agriculture in 2007 found that there were 47,846 farms covering 10.15 million acres of land in Georgia.<sup>2</sup>

During federal fiscal year 2009, Georgia ranked in the top ten nationally in estimated value of exports for seven different commodities.<sup>3</sup> Of those seven, we ranked first in export value for poultry and peanuts. Georgia ranked second behind Texas for cotton and linter, and cottonseed. The three other commodities are fruit and preparations, unmanufactured tobacco, and tree nuts, for which Georgia ranked third behind California and Oregon.

On September 7, 2011, the US Secretary of Agriculture declared 150 of Georgia's 159 counties federal agriculture disaster areas due to drought and extreme heat.<sup>4</sup> In 2010, the same declaration was made for all but eight of Georgia's counties. Only four counties have not been declared disaster areas due to drought and heat in one or both of the past two years. The counties that have qualified for this declaration have sustained a loss of thirty percent for at least one commodity. A federal disaster designation allows farmers in those areas to be eligible for emergency federal loans and other disaster assistance, including the Supplemental Revenue Assistance Program (SURE), through the USDA Farm Service Agency.

#### **AGRICULTURE AND IMMIGRATION**

When the Georgia General Assembly took up the issue of immigration reform during the 2011 legislative session, it was undoubtedly met with opposition. Ultimately, House Bill 87 was enacted and signed by the Governor and the focus turned from how to reform to what impact

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<sup>1</sup> Ag Snapshots FY11 <http://www.caed.uga.edu/publications/2011/pdf/AG%20SNAPSHOTS2011.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> 2007 Census of Agriculture  
[http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Full\\_Report/Volume\\_1,\\_Chapter\\_2\\_US\\_State\\_Level/st99\\_2\\_001\\_001.pdf](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_2_US_State_Level/st99_2_001_001.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> USDA Economic Research Services, Top 10 exporting states by commodity, fiscal 2010  
<http://www.ers.usda.gov/Data/StateExports/>

<sup>4</sup> Designation S3162  
<http://www.fema.gov/dhsusda/declarationDetail.do?action=Init&designationNumber=S3162&amendmentNumber=0>

this reform will have on our state, not just socially but also economically.<sup>5</sup> One of the industries that expected to be impacted greatly by the reform is also our largest, agriculture.

In June 2011, before the law took effect in July, at the request of the Governor, the Department of Agriculture released the results of a quick survey of 230 Georgia farmers to project the new law's impact on farm labor shortages. In anticipation of the new immigration laws taking effect, many migrant workers, which the agriculture industry relies heavily on for its grueling manual labor, fled the state with their families. This trend was not limited to illegal immigrants; many immigrants who were in Georgia legally also fled the state out of fear of being profiled. The survey revealed that those farmers surveyed expected to need more than 11,000 workers throughout the rest of the season. In reality this number is probably a little higher since only a portion of the state's farmers participated in the survey. In an effort to fill these holes, the state has tried to utilize unemployed probationers for farm labor. According to the Department, however, this is only a short term solution because it lacks the necessary stability. It should also be noted that the amount of labor required fluctuates throughout the year depending on the season and whether the crops maturing at that time are harvested more with machines or by hand.

Under the direction of HB 87, the Department is currently conducting an in-depth scientific study of the current and future impact of immigration on the state's agricultural industry. The Department will also address the need for and provide recommendations for the reform of the federal guest worker program. In doing so the Department is to evaluate the legal and economic feasibility of implementing a state guest worker program. The report with all of these findings is due to the Governor, Speaker of the House, and President of the Senate no later than January 1, 2012.

The Georgia Agribusiness Council (GAC) has been assisting the Department of Agriculture in conducting surveys and forums to collect data for its report on labor shortages. In August 2011, GAC met with cotton ginnerers and dairy producers. A survey released by Georgia Milk Producers, Inc. revealed that of the 75 responding dairies in the state, 56 percent indicated that their farms could not operate without immigrant workers.<sup>6</sup>

The UGA Center for Agribusiness and Economic Development has been studying the economic impact of labor shortages on Georgia's agriculture industry and harvesting and packaging of crops. Although the study does not provide reasons for the labor shortage, many farmers believe that the new immigration laws exacerbated an already present problem. The study, which looks at seven different crops from the 2011 spring and summer harvest, has projected that the labor shortages this year could result in a loss of 3,260 jobs and \$391 million for Georgia's economy.<sup>7</sup> The seven crops studied included blueberries, blackberries, Vidalia onions, bell peppers, squash, cucumbers and watermelons. In 2009, the production value of these seven crops was more than \$578 million.

The study drew conclusions from a survey conducted by the Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association (GFVGA). The 189 respondents represented 31,311 or 46.4 percent

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<sup>5</sup> HB87 (2011 Session) <http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/display/32190>

<sup>6</sup> GAC Ag Outlook September 2011 <http://www.ga-agribusiness.org/index.cfm?show=10&mid=188>

<sup>7</sup> "An Evaluation of Direct and Indirect Economic Losses Incurred by Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Producers in Spring 2011- A Preliminary Data Analysis and Summary Working Paper" <http://www.caed.uga.edu/publications/2011/pdf/GeorgiaFruitandVegetableSurveyAnalysis-3.pdf>

acres of the total Georgia berry and vegetable production acreage (67,513). Of those respondents, 148 said they had experienced a labor shortage in the spring of 2011.

In June 2011, a federal judge struck down what were deemed by some to be two of the toughest provisions of Georgia's new immigration law.<sup>8</sup> More recently, the President said that while the federal government would continue to enforce its current immigration laws, its focus and top priority for deportation would be those undocumented immigrants who committed criminal acts. The Georgia Agribusiness Council believes that these actions have had a positive impact on concerns that were previously being brought to their attention. Moreover, the labor shortages predicted for the fall have become less of a concern than once anticipated. This is particularly welcome news for the cotton ginner and dairy operators mentioned previously whose operations require a more experienced and knowledgeable skill set than some other areas of the agriculture industry.

The information released in the coming months should provide a clearer picture of the actual impact immigration reform has had and could continue to have on Georgia's largest industry.

### **JOINT AGRICULTURE EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMISSION**

On August 24, 2011, the Joint Agriculture Education Advisory Commission took advantage of the Special Session and held its annual meeting at the State Capitol. The Commission is co-chaired by Senate Agriculture and Consumer Affairs Chairman, Senator John Bulloch and House Appropriations Chairman, Representative Terry England. During the meeting Commission members heard updates on the state's Agricultural Education curriculum, Future Farmers of America (FFA) program, FFA Alumni Association, Young Farmer program, and Agricultural Education Extended Day/Year and Area Teacher programs.

During the 2010-2011 school year Georgia FFA reached a total membership of 31,252. This was the thirteenth consecutive year Georgia saw a growth in membership and the sixth consecutive year membership has set an all-time high record. Georgia has the third largest FFA enrollment nationally, bested only by California and Texas. The Georgia FFA Alumni Association also reported an increase in membership for a total of 2,444 members during the 2010-2011 school year.

The FFA Alumni Association not only keeps former FFA members involved in the FFA community, but it also helps to continue and grow FFA for new and current members. During the same school year, the total monetary value of support from the Alumni Association for Georgia FFA and agricultural education was more than \$24,000.

Under House Bill 125 of the 2011 regular legislative session, authorization for the Commission was extended until December 31, 2016.<sup>9</sup> The bill also amended the requirement that the Commission meet between two and four times a year. It will now meet at least once annually, with no maximum limit on the number of times it can meet in a year.

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<sup>8</sup> Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights, et al. v. Nathan Deal  
[http://www.gand.uscourts.gov/pdf/111cv1804\\_order.pdf](http://www.gand.uscourts.gov/pdf/111cv1804_order.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> HB125 (2011 Session) <http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/display/32307>