



The President and Congress have both recently expressed their desire to pursue bi-partisan comprehensive immigration reform, which is desperately needed to help meet the labor needs of American agriculture and small businesses. Unfortunately, the political climate in Washington is not likely to allow consideration, much less passage, of immigration reform in 2010. Meanwhile, many of Minnesota's farmers and small businesses will continue to struggle meeting their labor needs under the current guest worker program. The J-1 trainee and intern visa program could be a useful option for many of these farmers and businesses.

The J-1 visa program is a 12 to 18 month trainee and intern program in which participants are required to have a minimum of one year experience in their field as well as a minimum level of proficiency in English. The Communicating for Agriculture (CA) Foundation has had authority from the US State Department to issue applications for J-1 training visas in agriculture since 1985, and more recently in business as well. The CA Education Program (CAEP) administers these programs. CAEP works with partners in 50 different countries to find qualified participants with the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute to their host businesses. At a time when Minnesota's farmers and small businesses are struggling to meet their labor needs with domestic workers, and the temporary guest worker program is becoming more and more complicated to use, the J-1 trainee and intern visa could be the best and most flexible alternative for Minnesota farmers and small businesses needing a reliable and legal source of foreign workers.

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