



1600 20th Street, NW • Washington, D.C. 20009 • 202/588-1000 • www.citizen.org

NEWS RELEASE

April 27, 2012

Contact: Angela Bradbery (202) 588-7741

Shame on Obama Administration for Sacrificing Children to Keep Agribusiness Happy

*Statement of Dr. Sammy Almashat, Researcher,
Public Citizen's Health Research Group*

The Obama administration on Thursday once again sided with industry instead of workers on regulations and withdrew the Department of Labor's (DOL) proposed rules that would have restricted child workers from the most dangerous tasks in agriculture.

Agriculture is the last remaining industry in which children as young as 12 are allowed to work, thanks to a 75 year-old loophole in the Fair Labor Standards Act. It is also the most dangerous industry for workers, with child fatality rates four times that of youth in other industries. The new rules would have finally addressed this urgent issue.

This isn't the first time the rules have been undercut by the White House. The proposed rules were already delayed by the White House for nine months before it finally permitted their release last August. And in an extraordinary move, the administration stated yesterday that its decision to withdraw the rules "was made in response to thousands of comments expressing concerns about the effect of the proposed rules on small family-owned farms," despite the fact that family farms were explicitly exempted from the rules.

Industry critics of the rules, and their allies in Congress, constantly invoked the image of an idyllic family farm to conceal the reality that the rules were meant to address large, corporate farms where the majority of child laborers work and die. The White House not only caved to industry pressure, but also parroted its false argument as the reason for the rules' withdrawal.

In siding with the agricultural industry at the expense of the children it employs, the Obama administration has let industry preferences take precedence over the lives and health of child workers. More children will collapse from heat exposure, more will suffer from acute nicotine

poisoning while picking tobacco leaves, and more will be crushed to death in grain augers or tractor accidents – thanks to the Obama administration’s reversal.

The administration constantly invokes cost-benefit analysis to justify its inaction on regulations. Apparently, the administration considers these children’s lives and health a small cost to pay to win a few extra points from big agribusiness.

###

Public Citizen is a national, nonprofit consumer advocacy organization based in Washington, D.C. For more information, please visit www.citizen.org.