



By Maura Maxwell

Thursday 19th March 2020, 7:28 GMT

US growers braced for shortage of pickers



Government limits on worker visas set to limit the supply of seasonal workers to harvest crops

Fruit and vegetable producers in the US are preparing for a shortage of workers after the government announced it would suspend visa interviews in Mexico to try to halt the spread of the coronavirus.

From Wednesday, the authorities said they would no longer process new applications for the H2A guest worker programme, meaning that only returning temporary workers will be allowed to enter the country.

Fruit and vegetable growers who depend on migrant seasonal workers to pick their crops will be hardest hit.

Speaking to Reuters, Dave Puglia, president of Western Growers Association, which represents fruit and vegetable producers in states like California and Arizona, said:

"When the process stops halfway, those people are not likely to be there exactly when needed, if at all. That means lost crops. That means lost food," stated "Increasingly ... we just don't have the national workforce. We are turning more and more to H2A workers because there is no other way to harvest and pack our crops and deliver them to consumers."

Over 77,000 H2A visas were issued in March and April last year, just over a quarter of the total that were certified for 2019, according to figures from the US Department of Labour.