



In Bounds: *The Workforce*

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I really like fresh, red and ripe strawberries, picked in season, pervasive with a tantalizing sweetness and contrasting texture of seeds and flesh, ready for consumption straight from the box.

There is a crisis looming on the horizon. It has the potential to dramatically impact your profession, your family life, your ability to save for long term goals and your recreational budget, and my affinity for fresh strawberries.

A few years back a fellow superintendent and I were visiting about the use of Hispanic labor upon the golf courses in our area. Although I had not dabbled in the Latino labor force, Tom had and was excited about how it impacted his ability to provide his membership with the conditions they were expecting throughout the season.

"Jack, historically our course was expected, by both the players and I, to always be in fantastic condition during the months of June, July and August. This was very doable with the availability of both high school and college help during the peak months. In the spring and fall, when conditions were limited due to winter damage and play declined, "shoulder month" part-time labor supplemented in a large part by my assistant and me working real long hours produced a playable, but not perfect, golf course." Of course this was nothing new to me as I too experienced the same situations annually.

With a shrug he continued, "In recent years however, and I don't know if it has to do with the economy or the Augusta Syndrome, my golfers had begun to expect great conditions from opening day until we blew the irrigation system in the fall. As hard as I tried, I couldn't fill the positions needed to upgrade my product to their new expectations with the somewhat available senior citizens or nine-month seasonal Caucasian help. Thus I pursued the growing Hispanic population to fill my ranks." At this point a wide grin crossed Tom's face as he went on to discuss his success with his newly found

labor pool.

"I am having fun with my job again, Jack! My Amigo's, all eight whose names and numbers match, have given me the opportunity to again manage a golf course rather than "work" a golf course. Sure there was a language barrier, and sometimes confusion will lead to unusual incidents, but all in all they are fantastic. They are hard-working at 50 hours per week, available nine months of the year and happy to have a job. Not something I can say about the dead beat loads who melt over 80 degrees and or dissolve in a drizzle. I even pay them more than the rest of my crew because they are so consistently productive, but they are worth it. Yup, my job is a whole lot of fun again!"

A familiar story? I would say so at many clubs and "green" businesses within our state and across our country. But what would happen if we lost our labor force? Do we regress back a half-dozen

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years when nine-month employees were almost impossible to find at any price? Oh yes, and the ones you did locate didn't work weekends, had an aversion to physical labor and expected more from you than they were willing to work for.

From a very self-centered perspective I would find my job more difficult. My budget would need to be increased or my standards lowered. But take a look at the total picture. What would happen if we lost all of the illegal or perceived illegal aliens, because of faulty numbers or poor matches, not just on golf courses, but across the board.

It is speculated that there are 11 million illegals in our country. Hmm, they are here to work so I suspect that most have

been absorbed as productive paid members who support our society, individuals who produce in the agriculture arena, restaurants and home building. So let us suppose that 50 percent of the 11 million illegals are deported, thus creating 5.5 million job opportunities (however, many illegals tend to hold down more than one job at a time). As of September our country's documented unemployment number was 7.4 million people. Half of these are unemployable due to physical and/or mental limitations or they just don't want to work or the jobs available are beneath them. I am not a math guy but can add and subtract a bit. There just won't be enough laborers for the jobs created.

Help me out here. Why would we want to deport a viable and productive segment of our work force and replace them with...who? Would we jack up our wages to compete with all industries for employees? In turn we would need to cover the costs of our product and increase the price of golf. Other industries would increase wages just to keep their staff. A vicious cycle isn't it? And does the existing labor force not complement rather than compete with the "legal" work force?

Are you willing to pay three times as much as you do now for groceries?

Without field labor, food costs will skyrocket. Going to your favorite restaurant would be a rarity because both food and labor expenses will trickle down to your bill. After a hail storm damages your house, how much will your insurance cover and who will repair your roof? Will you be willing to pay the extra premiums?

Can you imagine the potential damage to our economy and life styles if we do not fix our broken laws rather than deporting our work force and allow them to pursue citizenship?

Some argue that they don't pay taxes so their presence is destroying our health and education structures. They do pay sales tax and have social security withheld. By creating an opportunity to legitimize their presence they will end up becoming no different than any other tax payer. They are already in the system so current burdens can only decrease as they pay more taxes.

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Another argument for deportation is that they are taking jobs from our citizens and our citizens' children. What a bunch of hog wash. I don't believe there are many of "us" out there who aspire to work 9 months out of the year at a low level job in the agricultural industry or full time, year round at an entry service position in the hospitality trade.

Personally, I do not know of many parents who dream to have their children follow the crops when it is time to harvest.

Today I am preaching to the choir. All of you appreciate that we need to have a reliable work force in our industry to fill positions available due to the dynamics of our population. We appreciate that without them our jobs would be more challenging and the cost of doing business would skyrocket. The trickle down effect could very well ruin many businesses. More expensive labor, if they are available, would equate to a more expensive end product, a product some may not pay for if too high.

But here is the crux of the crisis. According to Senator Norm Coleman only one in eight phone calls or emails sent to him

about immigrant status request to have the law changed to accommodate those already in the country on an average day. That number decreases to one in one hundred for a change in the law when the issue is on the fire. It is time we get our nominated government leaders to fix the broken law.

The legislatures need to develop a plan to maintain our already existing population of suspect employees through an amnesty program which would include the identification of

everyone who is questionable in the work force. They must be allowed to pay their fair share and also a penalty to get the paper work rolling and introduce them into the system, our system of paying taxes and eventually becoming citizens. Border security would be paramount as well.

But of most importance to keep the price and costs associated with strawberries, golf, restaurants and entertainment low is communicating the

issue with our friends, family and society in general. Too many people are oblivious to the importance of our agricultural and hospitality labor infrastructure. A grass roots effort has to be started to prevent the looming crisis. The broken law must be fixed. If we don't start today, our tomorrows may never be as fun.

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We recently announced the addition of three employees to our team:

**Tom McCann,
Mark Poppitz and
Wolf Weber**

The Tessman Company has been serving the green industry since 1950. We have locations in St. Paul, Fargo and Sioux Falls, distributing products to the commercial turf, landscape, golf, greenhouse and nursery markets.

We are also proud to announce that Roger Tychsen has joined our Team!

Roger brings 8 years of industry sales experience and 20 years of vendor rep experience. He will serve the Fargo Market.

Roger's other credentials: International Sales Manager for the Par Ex Professional Products Division of Vigoro Industries.

To contact them, call our St. Paul office at 651-487-3850, Fargo office at 701-232-7238 or their cell phone number below—

- ▶ **Tom McCann:** 612-865-7650
- ▶ **Mark Poppitz:** 612-940-5727
- ▶ **Wolf Weber:** 612-325-5411
- ▶ **Roger Tychsen:** 218-841-4444

We look forward to helping Tom, Mark, Wolf and Roger serve your turf supply needs!