

U.S. industry groups have praised the State Department's decision to speed up global processing of H-2A visas, saying it will greatly help produce companies hire much-needed farmworkers.

The fruit and vegetable industry last week became concerned when the Department [announced that it would suspend processing](#) new visas under the guest worker program in Mexico.

"We anticipate the vast majority of otherwise qualified H-2A applicants will now be adjudicated without an interview," according to a State Department announcement on its travel website.

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue announced the breakthrough Thursday night and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo tweeted a confirmation Friday.

Secretary Pompeo, in consultation with the Department of Homeland Security, has authorized consular officers to expand the categories of H-2 visa applicants whose applications can be adjudicated without an in-person interview.

Consular officers can, if they so choose, now waive the visa interview requirement for first-time and returning H-2 applicants who have no potential ineligibility.

This expansion increases the period in which returning workers may qualify for an interview waiver. Applicants whose previous visas expired in the last 48 months (increased from 12 months), and who did not require a waiver of ineligibility the last time they applied, do not need to be interviewed in-person if they are applying for the same visa classification as their previous visa.

The State Department anticipates the vast majority of otherwise qualified H-2 applicants will now be processed without an interview.

Produce Marketing Association (PMA) vice president of global membership & engagement Richard Owen said the organization is pleased by the decision increase processing of H-2A visa holders.

"With the expansion of interview waiver eligibility, the majority of H-2 processing can continue," he said.

"This decision will ensure the flow of labor necessary for the produce industry to continue to provide fresh and healthy products to consumers."

Western Growers president and CEO Dave Puglia also applauded the "practical approach to meeting the critical workforce needs of American farmers while protecting the health and safety of State Department personnel".

"The steps taken by Secretary Pompeo ease the flow of guest workers at a time when our farmers are redoubling their efforts to provide our nation with safe, healthy, abundant and affordable food," he said.

"We are grateful to Secretary Pompeo, Secretary Perdue and all those in the Administration who listened to the needs of the agriculture community in the midst of our present crisis, and acted swiftly to implement this common-sense solution."