



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on April 30, 2012

Labor Department Withdraws New Rules on Farm Labor

The farming industry exuded praise on Thursday after the Department of Labor (DOL) axed a regulation proposed last September that would have imposed stringent rules on young people's ability to help run their own family farms. The DOL statement, issued late last Thursday, [affirmed](#), "The decision to withdraw this rule — including provisions to define the 'parental exemption' — was made in response to thousands of comments expressing concerns about the effect of the proposed rules on small family-owned farms."



Michigan farmers were particularly vocal in their opposition to the new rules, as they submitted hundreds of comments expressing honest concern over the proposal, which would've effectively abolished the existing system of agricultural education by barring young workers from feeding cattle, milking cows, stacking hay bales higher than a specified height, among a slew of other frivolous regulations.

"This is a tribute to the farmers all over the country who spoke up," asserted Ryan Findlay, legislative counsel for the Michigan Farm Bureau (MFB). "More than 500 Michigan farmers submitted comments on the rule directly, and many more contacted their members of congress, challenged administration officials on the rule, spoke out through online forums and aired their concerns in local papers."

The DOL's initiative would have quashed the side-by-side work of family members from multiple generations, as well as hindering parents from instilling the values necessary to develop sound work ethics. "Farmers understand the need for common sense regulation, but making it illegal for a 15-year-old to carry a flashlight or use an electric screwdriver on a farm was going too far," said Findlay. "Farm Bureau believes in agriculture and the work ethic that youth can learn on a farm. We believe this is the common sentiment across Michigan and across the United States and we're pleased the DOL finally realized it too."

Sen. Jerry Moran (R-Kan.) said the DOL regulations would even prevent children from using pressurized garden hoses or battery-powered screwdrivers. "Those regulations were very specific, things that seem very lacking in common sense and in many ways just crazy," Moran said at a news conference in Topeka, Kansas, an area where the proposal as met heated opposition.

While labor officials attempted to suppress controversy over the rule by excluding children who worked on family farms, the proposal met staunch opposition from Republicans, who branded it as an oppressive regulation that attacks both the family and the overall mechanics of the farming industry. Consequently, many of the rule's proponents blamed President Obama for caving to political pressure.

Reid Maki with the Child Labor Coalition said the DOL's decision translates into more deaths of children involved in farming accidents. "There was tremendous heat, and I don't think it helped that it was an election year," Maki [averred](#). "A lot of conservatives made a lot of political hay out of this issue."



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Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) echoed Maki's concerns, saying the federal government should not elude its responsibility to keep children safe just to appease certain constituents. "I am disappointed that the administration chose to walk away from regulations that were, at their core, about protecting children and which could have been revised to correct some of the initial proposals that generated the most concern," Harkin stated.

Some proponents of the rule were more dramatic, as Zama Coursen-Neff, deputy children's rights director at Human Rights Watch, [said](#) the DOL is looking the other way "when children get crushed, suffocated, and poisoned on the job."

Conversely, freedom-loving advocates point out the despotic elements of the burdensome rules, as they blatantly trample on the founding fathers' vision to establish a limited government that preserves the liberty of its inhabitants. "Now that the federal government is planning to, for all intents and purposes, outlaw chores on the farm," said Republican presidential candidate Ron Paul, "I wonder when the Department of Labor will forbid parents from requiring children to make their beds, clean their rooms, or set the table for dinner."

In effect, the rule travels far beyond just a threat to private business, as it launches a direct attack on the family, while suppressing the rights of parents to raise their children as they see fit. Congressman Paul summed up the DOL's now-extinct directive:

The Department of Labor's plan to issue new regulations applying child labor laws to family farms is an outrageous assault on America's farmers. My parents were dairy farmers who required me and my brothers to help out on the farm. I certainly benefited from this experience, and, as a Representative of a congressional district containing a large number of farmers, I have had the opportunity to meet many farmers who learned about their profession by doing chores on their parents' farms. Working on a family farm also provides a tremendous opportunity to form a strong work ethic that these children will carry through the rest of their lives.



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