

HB 2955 A STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Senate Committee On Rules

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Meeting Dates: 5/16

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Designates August 4 of each year as Bracero Program Day. Declares emergency, effective on passage.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

An executive order called the Mexican Farm Labor Program established the Bracero Program in 1942, which permitted millions of Mexican men to work legally in the United States on short-term agricultural and railroad labor contracts. Braceros entered the United States under six-month to twelve-month contracts and were assigned nationwide, including the Pacific Northwest, to address a national agricultural labor shortage during World War II. The Mexican workers were called Braceros because they worked with their arms and hands. From 1942 to 1964, 4.6 million contracts were signed, with many individuals returning several times on different contracts, making it the largest U.S. contract labor program. The program ended on December 31, 1964, as mechanization became more widespread ([Library of Congress, 1942: Bracero Program](#)).

The Braceros helped Oregon sustain agricultural production during the war and were important in maintaining railroad lines for the transportation of goods, war materials, and people. Although implemented at the federal level, the program in Oregon was administered by Oregon State College (now Oregon State University). From 1942 to 1947, 15,136 Mexican men were recruited to come to Oregon ([Oregon Encyclopedia, Bracero Program](#)). Between 1942 and 1947, the U.S. government paid for the transportation of Braceros either by railroad or aircraft. After 1947 growers were responsible for the transportation of workers to and from Mexico. The cost was prohibitive for Oregon growers, contributing to the end of the program in the state in 1947.

The United States and Mexico agreed on a set of protocols to protect Braceros from discrimination and poor wages. Nonetheless, the Braceros experienced discrimination and surcharges for room and board, deducted pay, and exposure to deadly chemicals.

House Bill 2955 A designates August 4 as Bracero Program Day.