

February 16, 2015

House Business and Labor Committee

Senate Workforce Committee

Good evening,

My name is Brenda Frketich and I'm a third generation farmer from St. Paul. I manage a 1000 acre farm raising grass seed, hazelnuts, wheat, clover, vegetables, and vegetable seeds. I employ myself, my husband, and two more year round employees. Throughout the year we also utilize anywhere from 5-10 seasonal employees.

I want to start out by saying that good employees are hard to find. I think that anyone who owns or runs a business can attest to the fact that turnover in any industry is frustrating and costly. I will also say that agriculture is no different. Having our full time employees, one who has been with us for 25 years and the other 14 years is invaluable to our farm. The second thing I would like to mention is that agriculture doesn't have much for margins, our farm especially can't pay top dollar for good mechanics for instance. But we do have some advantages because we can offer a nice "package" when we hire. For example, our farm gives health insurance to our employees and their families, we also provide sick pay and vacation pay. We also provide a house for them to live in, we pay their power bill on that property and provide them a pick-up to use for work. Because of these benefits, yes including sick pay, we have the ability to retain workers. We have employees who show up to work, but also enjoy the occasional time away with their families.

With sick pay specifically we provide 32 hours a year to our full time, year round employees. This starts after their probation period of 6 months. This allows us to not have the paperwork headache of keeping track of all seasonal employees time and just keep tabs on our full time workers. I personally am the payroll person, HR person, manager, tractor driver, combine driver, you get the jest; I don't have to time or the resources to be adding to my work load by keeping track of all employees as they come on and off this farm continuously throughout the year.

So if one of my seasonal workers is sick, how would I deal with that? I encourage them to stay home to get better. If they do show up for work, our farm is set up so that we don't have much hand to product contact. It is easy to find them a job to do that doesn't involved the raw food product. We have a hand washing policy in our Good Agricultural Practices handbook. We provide areas to do that hand washing out in the field and where ever they may be working. I truly feel like we are doing our best to keep food safe and our workers healthy.

This year we are looking at an increase in the minimum wage, \$15 is a staggering number for employers in agriculture. Not just because of our seasonal workers who start at minimum wage, but because that would be a drastic increase in how much we pay our full time employees that we have now. It seems to be just one more thing after another to hammer small employers. I can tell you right now that the benefits package I mentioned earlier, we cannot afford that by any means if this wage increase happens. This along with paid sick leave, flex plan, etc.; all seem to me to be ways to benefit the employee and in no way help out the employer who has to pay for these jobs. Jobs will be lost on our farm if this all goes through, and I think that is so unfortunate.

I agree that people need to be treated fairly where they work. I think that as a small business we are doing what we can to make our employees feel that way and I think purely by our retention of those good employees they would agree. But I also think that we need to look at the business environment in Oregon and think of ways that we can be helpful to the employers and in turn they can be good to their employees. I know that the business I run effects many more people than just my family, so I want to keep the tradition of doing right by our employees; to do that though we need to stop adding to the paperwork and burden that is being put on small businesses in Oregon especially those in agriculture. We have a unique industry here in Oregon and I don't feel like this sick leave requirement is a good fit for us.

Thank you for your consideration,



Brenda Frketich

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