

February 9, 2016

RE: SB 1532 - Raising Oregon's minimum wage - **Opposed**

Senator Johnson,

My name is Stefani Evers; I am a third-year college student, and a fifth generation dairy farmer from Washington County. I was lucky enough to grow up on my family's 400 hundred-head dairy farm, where I learned the value of hard work and dedication. Delivering a healthy calf, and then watching it grow into a happy, healthy cow is a wonderful feeling like no other, and I wouldn't trade my childhood on the farm for the world.

My family and I ran the dairy ourselves, with the help of two to three hired helpers. All of the hired workers received minimum wage, with the opportunity for a raise after a certain amount of time. While dairying is a necessary and fulfilling way of life, it is typically not the most profitable. Paying a higher minimum wage would require small family farms just like mine to pay more than they are able. There is no doubt in my mind that most would continue on as long as they could, the farmers working themselves to the bone trying to keep their livelihood afloat. As you likely already know, we are losing dairy farms at an alarming rate, and a raise in the minimum wage would lead to the sellout of even more dairies across the state.

Unfortunately, dairy farmers and their families would not be the only ones negatively impacted by a higher minimum wage. This last summer, I was given the opportunity to work on a baling crew for Bashaw Land & Seed, a grass seed farm based in Harrisburg, OR. While I grew up driving tractors, working the dirt, and baling hay, this was a whole new world. I was able to learn more than I ever could have imagined, met some truly amazing people, and had so much fun while doing it. This may seem off topic, but I never would have been hired if the minimum wage had been higher. Instead of hiring students like myself, it would be much more financially feasible for Bashaw Land & Seed, along with so many other farms, to hire experienced, foreign labor and pay them the same wage that students like me would be receiving. Not only does this limit job opportunities in agriculture for young Oregonians, it would keep people like me from getting the experiences that we need.

Less than 2% of the U.S. population is directly involved in agriculture, please do not let that number sink any lower.

I had the opportunity to spend most of this last Monday in the capitol building representing the dairy farmers of Oregon and helping spread awareness about the dairy industry. Though I was disappointed that I was not able to meet with you, I truly enjoyed getting to know some of the wonderful people that you have the good fortune to work with.

Thank you very much for your time, and for all of the hard work that you put in to make our state a better place.

Sincerely,

Stefani Evers

From the Desk of  
Senator Ted Ferrioli