

3/4/2021

To whom it may concern,

My name is Evan Thomas and I am a 5<sup>th</sup> generation farmer in Jefferson county. The 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> generation also live and work on the family farm. Our family started farming here in 1907. We grow carrots seed, Kentucky bluegrass seed, Peppermint for oil, Timothy hay, garlic, and wheat, and employ 5 full time employees. We currently farm 1300 irrigated acres. We also hire seasonal employees, many of whom come back to our farm year after year. I want to share with you my concerns about the real impact of HB 2358 on both my farm and my employees, which is scheduled for a public hearing in the House Business and Labor Committee on March 8th.

HB 2358 would require every farm and ranch in Oregon to pay overtime to employees after 40 hours of work. Currently, agriculture is exempt from overtime pay under the federal Fair Labor Standards Act and in most other states because of the unique seasonal nature of agricultural production, affecting both the total period when agricultural activities can be pursued and the days within the "season" when work can be performed.

HB 2358 proposes the most aggressive overtime policy in the country, which would be devastating for local farmers and our employees, who are already struggling financially.

As a farmer, I am a price taker, which means that I cannot simply increase the sale price of my crops to account for added labor costs. Consumers set our prices and will buy from other states or countries that sell at a cheaper price. I will have to absorb any added overhead. That's the economic reality I deal with every day.

I will not be able to afford the added payroll costs proposed in HB 2358, as it will likely cost me over \$100,000 in new labor costs. To stay in business, I will be forced to limit the number of hours worked by my employees to 40 hours in a week to avoid the added expense of overtime pay. I do not want to do this, and my employees do not want me to do this, but that is the practical reality of this bill.

Farming/Ranching are tough enough when things go right, but when our state is in a multi-year drought, costs continue to rise, and then add employment costs to our overhead, we will not be able to operate. I know it's not the goal of this bill to reduce employee take-home pay, but HB 2358 demands wages that are not possible with the economics of agriculture and will result in reduced pay and hours for farm employees.

I am very concerned that this policy hasn't been well-vetted and will actually harm those it intends to help.

Please oppose HB 2358 this session. This bill would negatively impact not only family farmers and ranchers in Oregon, but also agricultural workers!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Evan M. Thomas" followed by a horizontal line.

Evan M. Thomas