

Esteemed representatives, I write to you to describe the grave harm passing house bill 2358 would do to my farm and Oregon agriculture. I am a third generation Willamette Valley farmer. My grandparents bought a small farm outside of Cornelius, Oregon in 1951 and their 10 kids were the main source of labor for the dairy they started. The dairy business has low margins. Milk is a commodity, and breaking even or achieving profitability on a dairy is a matter of relentless work, organization, attention to detail and in some measure luck. The family dairy was not lucrative but it did teach the kids how to work and how to farm. Four of the 10 kids are still farming in Oregon.

In 1973 my grandmother co-signed on a loan for my dad to buy a piece of Willamette river bottom ground south of Salem. From this small base, the farm has slowly grown in scale to its present size. We grow a variety of seasonally-intensive crops: strawberries, blueberries, blackberries, kiwi-fruit, wine grapes, Christmas trees, grass seed, hazelnuts and we have an ornamental plant nursery that sells to small retailers, wholesalers and re-wholesalers. In all of these enterprises save the nursery we do not set the price of our goods and we sell them into a market supplied by farmers in other states and countries. For example, blueberries grown in Mexico or Peru or North Carolina can be found alongside Oregon berries at domestic supermarkets during the summer harvest season. No special premium is paid to the grower for Oregon fruit, whether it is sold in-state or out of state. Any extra cost borne by Oregon growers is not passed on to their customers.

In reference specifically to my farm, in 2020 our total labor cost was more than 55% of our total expenses. Without changing the hours our employees worked, the cost of HB 2358 in 2020 would have resulted in a 9% increase in labor cost, far, far more than the farm in its current incarnation could absorb. The low margins inherent to agriculture would require reducing employee hours and hence reducing gross employee pay. Given the paucity of available farm workers not just in Oregon but in the whole country, a likely adaptation would entail eliminating our labor intensive crops, namely the nursery, the berries, the wine grapes, and the Christmas trees and growing only hazelnuts and seed crops, which require much less labor. This would reduce the number of people the farm employs and its gross income significantly.

It is no exaggeration to say that HB 2358 is an existential threat to the continued operation of my farm and Oregon agriculture. Vast swathes of the existing Oregon ag landscape will be wiped out by this bill, unable to continue to compete against other states and countries selling into the same market without this extraordinary added cost. Farm work is by nature seasonal. The weather provides limited opportunities to plant, harvest and do the necessary cultural work to grow productive plants. During those intervals we must act; harvest the fruit or it rots; plant or you will have nothing to harvest. Please help secure a future for Oregon agriculture and do not pass HB 2358.

Willy Dinsdale,
Co-owner of Blue Heron Farm