

3/8/2021

Testimony for HB 2358 Oppose

To: Oregon House Business and Labor Committee

I am Gary Harris a second-generation farmer doing business as Harris Farms. I farm 600 acres in Jefferson County raising carrot seed and bluegrass. At age 75, I have been farming 51 years since graduating from OSU in 1969. I oppose HB 2258 and the harmful effects it will have on agriculture.

Ag Labor

Agriculture workers are scarce, mobile, and precious. I pray every year I can find the workers for my farming needs and Covid-19 does not isolate my vital work crew. I pay and reward my workers mightily, if I do not, they may take work elsewhere and not in the harsh outside weather. My small farm 2020 payroll with bonuses averaged \$23.67/ hour (11,815 hours, paid \$280378.37). A 20-30% increase via overtime will make farm profits slimmer. Previously, I raised hand harvested onion seed and one million pounds of garlic each year for 25 years. No longer possible to due labor costs and a shortage of workers.

Farm Work is not Eight-hour Shift Work

Farm labor is seasonal, long hard days from day light to dark. Workers are required to be on farm as the crops demand, including morning and evenings to irrigate. Do I ask my irrigators to come to work at 5 am then to go home and return for the evening watering? Where do I find a second shift of nonexistent workers? Factories can add shifts to make more widgets and increasing their volume, my farm fields yield by the grace of God but one good crop each season. Farm work tasks vary every day, workers do different jobs throughout the season. My two \$250,000 combines do not just sit idle after an eight-hour day. They need to be serviced and run as many hours as possible. Weather permitting, to get my seed into the bin. Where do I find more skilled equipment operators?

Central Oregon Drought

Farmers in the Jefferson County desert need Bureau of Reclamation water delivered to our farms 24 hours a day. Our reservoir is at the lowest level in history, 53% full. My irrigators must be on the farm, moving precious water at all times of the day to meet the crop requirements and to conserve what scarce water I will receive. My water costs for 2020 were \$75.128.25.

Oregon's burden for Workplace

I am crazy for not retiring. I used to enjoy my daily tasks on the farm. Now, instead of a sole proprietor farmer, I am a bookkeeper and HR compliance officer. The payroll paperwork is extreme: unemployment and payroll with its reporting monthly, Oregon Saves retirement programs for my workers, Covid compliance, OSHA and farm safety meetings, quarterly CAT tax reporting (hopefully not a carbon tax or new diesel fuel tax), new hires reporting, sick leave, and implementing habitat conservation plans for endangered species, frogs and fish.

EFU land use

I served on the Land Conservation and Development Commission for eight years, '96 to '04. Goal 3 is to preserve Oregon's struggling ag farms. Rural lands protection is the hallmark of Oregon. If Salem keeps adding regulatory burdens and cost increases, we will have to plant houses instead of crops. Why hinder the agricultural economy that has an annual farm gate value of \$5+ billion and an overall added value footprint of \$28.9 billion. Which is 15% of the Oregon's economy and 12% of the jobs. Oregon agriculture is a huge, traded sector economy. Currently 75-80% of the ag production leaves the state and 40% goes offshore, bringing new money into the state and our nation.

Ag Overtime is Not Necessary

The federal fair labor exemption for agriculture should stand. Let Washington state first experiment with its new rules. Oregon with its 200+ crops must not lose their markets or once gone, may never return. Animals do not eat for just eight hours, my crops grow 24 hours a day, and weeds and pests (insects and Canadian geese) are always present. Hopefully, my farm remains profitable, so I can continue to reward my employees for working with me. HB 2358 will be detrimental to agriculture today and tomorrow.

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