

I was born and raised on a Central Oregon cattle ranch and as such, while paying my way through college and after, have always found farm work the most personally rewarding. However the wages meant that I couldn't make ends meet, sometimes being late on rent and truck payments because my pay was not enough to build a financial foundation, and ultimately led to me leaving the state to take a position in Texas, where I now reside. Unfortunately a lot of people who work in agriculture don't have better opportunities like I did, and even if they did we would still need to eat. We owe a great deal to the workers, the people who make the farms run, but as it stands most of them have to accept substandard living conditions and weak purchasing power because of low wages. Potentially some isolated farms could use an offer of overtime as a competitive advantage in hiring, but that was something I only found once in my time working across Oregon, as it appears instead the industry has agreed to use workers' low income backgrounds or lack of English fluency against them. This is a very personally rewarding career path but because the long hours and the toll on the work-life balance are not financially rewarded, it should come as no surprise to the industry or the state that those who get the opportunity to leave, do. This step would be a vital one towards ensuring a new generation of farm workers are retained.