

Hello,

I am a young farmer in Hood River County. We grow pears and apples. I strongly oppose HB 2358. My opposition is not out of greed but concern about the already tight margins and difficulty of operating with more and more regulation being piled on top of farmers. The nature of our work is very labor intensive and time sensitive. To accomplish the same amount of work in a timely manner to avoid paying overtime we would have to hire more temporary workers, this would create multiple issues. For one, our crew, who have been with us for decades would be upset to have hours cut and ultimately make less money, forcing them to find other less steady employment after hours and on weekends. We are a small farm so I would really have to limit paying overtime as much as possible. Secondly, having to hire more temporary workers would cost me more in training, administration, logistics of having more people in the field, less skilled workers or workers not familiar with how we operate causing safety issues and possibly more injuries.

The pear industry has already been hit hard with regulation at a time pear prices and returns have been flat for years. The pandemic has hit us hard with more costs to keep workers safe and making sure we are complying with OSHA regulations that most likely won't be going back to normal anytime soon if ever. We are competing with other countries, not just other states, countries that do not have regulations like we do but are still allowed to sell their product in the United States and all over the world. More regulations and costs puts us at a disadvantage in the pear industry. We are continuing to have to deal with rising costs of production even though our returns have not been rising with costs of inflation.

I personally already work seven days a week from spring until fall, if I have to deal with shortage of labor that will only make life as a young farmer more difficult to raise a family. Hood River County is already nearly impossible to afford to live on a young farmer's salary. More cost to doing business will likely force me out of purchasing more land and most likely keep my kids from being able to farm as well, ending a five generation farm. Minimum wage going up to compete with levels of metro areas like Portland or Seattle already is creating a burden on an industry that is not keeping up with the rate of inflation. We have done a lot on our own to help out employees, we pay a decent wage, we have built nice housing for families that work for us, we create work whenever we can to keep people employed. We are not major corporations that can absorb extra costs associated with this bill. We are primarily small family farms in the Hood River Valley.

It is already hard enough to stay in business because as we all know farmers are the bad guys, farm is a four letter word, food that grows on farms is bad for you... we are constantly fighting an uphill battle. More rules and regulations are driving people away from farming. But apparently feeding the world isn't important enough to take care of the people that are taking on the risk to do that task.

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Hood River County