

I am going on record opposing HB 2358. I am a first generation grower. My family history originated in the Kansas dust bowl era. My grandfather migrated to Hood River Valley in 1939 and started out as a farm hand working in the orchards and in logging camps.

After completing a BS in crops and horticulture from OSU I went to work in the fruit industry as a crop advisor. Beginning in 1988 I started leasing orchards and since then have increased our farming operation to approximately 300 total acres of both leased and owned ground. By working two jobs and my spouse working full-time we have been able to grow our business in spite of typically low profit margins. We grow pears, cherries, apples and blueberries in the Hood River Valley. Our operation employs around 35 people mostly year round depending on the weather. During cherry harvest we max out at 70 employees.

Twice in my career as a tree fruit grower since 1988 my farming operation was close to going broke due to negative profit margins and bankers withholding operating funds. I survived due to outside of farming employment and figuring out how to reduce costs on low margin commodities.

Our full-time employees are provided with family housing free of charge year-round. We also offer cell phones, company pickups and bonuses to the supervisors. Due to our diversity of crops, our entire workforce is kept busy from the time we start pruning in the winter until after apple harvest is completed in November.

If we are forced to start paying over-time after 40 hrs/wk we will once again need to figure out how to keep the bankers from "taking the farm". Likely we will start pruning sooner in December and finish later in the spring due to not working more than 40 hrs/wk. We will also hire more people to reduce the hrs/wk/yr to all the employees but still get the jobs completed. Bottom line - we will not continue with the same weather dependent schedule of working greater than 40hrs/wk when the "sun is shining". In the short term it may seem like the farm workers will make more money/yr with overtime. But rest assured, for those of us that want to survive as small family farms, we will avoid working overtime as much as possible and most farm workers will likely see less revenue/yr as a result.