

My name is Jenneke deJong and we own and operate 2 dairy farms in Klamath County. We produce organic milk, farm 10,000 acres and employ 70 employees, many of whom have worked for us for more than 10 years. I want to share with you my concerns about the real impact of HB 2358 on both my farm and my employees, which is scheduled for a public hearing in the House Business and Labor Committee on March 29th.

HB 2358 would require every farm and ranch in Oregon to pay overtime to employees after 40 hours of work, with no exceptions or consideration of peak season. This is the most aggressive overtime policy in the country, which would be devastating for local farmers and our employees.

Agriculture is experiencing a serious workforce shortage, and I already do a lot to compensate my employees for their hard work. For example we provide pickups to take home, buy them a meal on a weekly basis, pay very competitive wages, help our employees get into houses.

I want to do everything I can to keep my employees happy, but we also need to make ends meet. Our milk price is pretty stable, but I will not get a higher pay price to account for added labor costs. Our pay price is determined by demand. I will have to absorb any added overhead. That's the economic reality we deal with every day.

I will not be able to afford the added payroll costs proposed in HB 2358, as it will likely cost me 2,000,000 in new labor costs. To stay in business, I will be forced to limit the number of hours worked by my employees to 40 hours in a week to avoid the added expense of overtime pay. I do not want to do this, and my employees do not want me to do this, but that is the practical reality of this bill.

Farmers and ranchers will have to mechanize operations, transition to less labor-intensive crops, or even move outside of Oregon to stay in business. Farm employees are at risk of losing their jobs if downsizing, switching crops, or mechanizing are the only options available to a farm or ranch.

As a family business, we can't operate at a loss year-over-year, so we have to control costs that seem to increase every year in Oregon. I know it's not the goal of this bill to reduce employee take-home pay, but HB 2358 demands wages that are not possible with the economics of agriculture and will result in reduced pay and hours for farm employees.

I am very concerned that this policy hasn't been well-vetted and will actually harm those it intends to help. Those who want the bill have not even done an analysis of how much this will cost!

Please oppose HB 2358 this session. This bill will negatively impact not only family farmers and ranchers in Oregon, but also agricultural workers!

Kind Regards,  
Jenneke deJong