

TO: House Committee on Business and Labor
FROM: Susannah Morgan, CEO
RE: HB 4002: Honoring the dignity and skills unique to agricultural work
DATE: February 8, 2022



Chair Holvey and members of the committee,

Oregon Food Bank's mission is to eliminate hunger and its root causes. We believe in an Oregon where everyone is welcome and has the opportunity to thrive.

We know that, due to a host of institutional and systemic challenges, immigrant and refugee Oregonians face disproportionate food insecurity in our communities, double the rate of people born inside the United States. This includes many Oregonians who are vital to the production and distribution of food throughout our region – a reality that is particularly unacceptable.

To make matters worse, the public health and economic impacts of the pandemic have fallen hardest on people who have faced systemic inequities for generations, including migrant and seasonal farmworkers. Oregon's 174,000 seasonal and migrant farmworkers perform essential skilled labor - benefiting everyone in our communities - despite facing a pandemic, catastrophic wildfires, hazardous air quality levels and winter storms.

Yet there is a gap between the recognition that farmworkers are essential and wages, labor laws, and benefit programs which exclude many farmworkers. Farmworkers are some of the lowest paid workers in Oregon with a median income of \$28,000 a year. This leads to increased food insecurity and adverse health outcomes. Depending on a family's specific situation - many farmworkers are also excluded from other types of critical assistance, which can include food (SNAP), health care, the Child Tax Credit, the federal Earned Income Tax Credit, Social Security, and Unemployment Insurance.

Oregon Food Bank recognizes that the root causes of hunger are systemic injustices. We believe it is important to name that the exclusion of farm laborers written into the 1938 "Fair Labor Standards Act" was a product of the racism of the Jim Crow era in which it was written. While we cannot change the past, Oregon has the opportunity to address this inequity moving forward by joining a growing number of states to eliminate barriers to overtime pay for farmworkers.

Farmworkers who put food on our table should be able to put food on their own table and make enough money to do so. **We believe the time is now to honor our shared humanity by advancing overtime protections for farmworkers.**

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