

I'm a 4th generation dairy farmer in Malheur County. My family had a dairy farm in NC for 3 generations before I moved and married in Oregon. When I married an Oregon Dairyman in 2007 we became the 4th. We are technically employees on his parents dairy. And are raising our 3 boys to be the 5th generation when and if they choose. But we make no promises to them as dairy farming is one of the hardest jobs on all fronts. We are the ultimate "price takers" with supply many times out of sync with demand... and that demand is 24/7. Just last night we sent our fellow employees home at 7:30pm while colostrum (first milk) thawed so we could feed two new calves. Our kids were there with us, finishing their homework, eating snacks as dinner couldn't be eaten till we made it home. Our oldest, covered in amniotic fluid and sweat (from pulling the last calf, and basketball practice two hours before) asked why someone else couldn't stay... he was hungry, tired, and ready for a real dinner. Our reply "tonight is our night". The problem with Ag overtime is that currently we take turns on pulling the last shift. If it passes we will no longer have that option. Our reply will change to "it's always our night". You see this small business can't afford one more financial kick. As salary employees and vested family members we aren't going to argue that we worked over 40. But we cannot ask our fellow employees to do the same. When their 40 (under the proposal ) is up they will need to go home. But calves don't get that privilege. Neither do calving mamma cows, or crops that can't wait when rain is in the forecast. There's no pressing "pause" in this work. And honestly that's what makes it the BEST job out there! My kids are discovering what they can do...by meeting the challenges of what is being asked of them. Our oldest took the comment, picked up his head a little more, and asked "what else can I do to help?" He knew if we were staying he was staying, and he might as well be useful. I don't want to raise kids that think at a certain time they get to go home no matter what work is left to do. I hope we are raising our 5th generation to know you go check all the animals before you leave, and if something isn't right you fix it then! You don't leave a cow having trouble calving... just because your 40 is up. You don't just call someone else in because there's a new calf that needs fed and your 40 is up. You don't park the silage truck/feed wagon/ bottle trailer when the job isn't done because your hours are up... not if there's no one else to help.

I understand there are injustices. And certainly there are employers who have taken advantage of employees, requiring way more work than they were willing to do. But 40 hour weeks aren't going to solve that. Employees that want to work more may not get that opportunity. And employees, like us, will do so off the clock to make ends meet. The balance will be lost.

I honestly feel this proposal is "feel good", but definitely not "do good".

From Farm Bureau:

Livestock operations have unique needs. Cows, sheep and other livestock rely on 24-hour supervision and response and require a flexible workforce year-round. Implementing overtime at 40 hours will be difficult if not impossible for livestock producers. How will I care for my animals if an emergency comes up or on the open range? The market doesn't give me the ability to demand a higher price for beef or milk simply because Oregon increases labor costs. Costs for feed, fuel and supplies are skyrocketing. Labor costs come straight from the bottom line at a time when many farms and ranches are struggling to stay afloat. An inflexible 40-hour overtime mandate simply won't work for our industry.

Many employees, particularly those who work with cattle or sheep on the range, choose to work in solitude in remote areas where on-duty time and off-duty time is harder to calculate. Federal law already exempts those principally involved in "range work," because it's such a poor fit for traditional wage and hour requirements. It doesn't make sense to craft a one-size-fits-all policy that will immediately shutter sectors of Oregon agriculture.

At a 40-hour overtime threshold, workers risk losing shifts, total hours and take-home pay. In addition, the new labor costs might cause trade-offs for current benefits like insurance and housing. With increasing labor costs, many producers simply may not be able to continue providing these additional benefits to their workers. Agricultural overtime could have dire consequences for the families who depend on ranches and dairies for their income.

Please oppose a 40-hour overtime mandate for Oregon agriculture. It won't work for livestock producers. Our needs aren't seasonal, and imposing new costs at this difficult time will sacrifice our local, family-owned dairies, livestock operations, and range operations.