

Submitter: Frances Hathaway

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Business and Labor

Measure: HB4002

We grow/raise hazelnuts, orchardgrass seed, grass hay, alfalfa hay, sheep & cattle in Benton County and employ one employee, who works year-round on our operation. I want to share with you my concerns about the impact of an ag overtime mandate on my operation and employees.

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 HB 4002, an overtime mandate 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. Grain prices are often not that much different than 20-30 years ago. We farmers don't have control like other industries over our prices we receive.

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 under HB 4002. 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.