

Submitter: Megan Cozart

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Business and Labor

Measure: HB4002

We are commercial poultry producers in Yamhill County and employ 7 employees, many of whom work year-round on our operation. We also raise cows and sheep and produce our own hay. 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. In fact, the stipulations of our fryer contract state that someone must be within 15 minutes of the farm at all times! Implementing HB 4002, an overtime mandate at 40 hours, will be difficult if not impossible for livestock producers. Staffing to meet that demand, not to mention finding workers willing to work, can be challenging. Our employees are well compensated, receive year end bonus and are very much appreciated. Our contract with our integrator is non-negotiable and we are unable to demand a higher price 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 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.