

February 8, 2022

House Committee on Business and Labor

RE: OPPOSED to HB 4002, Farmworker Overtime

Chair Holvey, Vice Chair Bonham and members of the committee.

For the record, my name is Marie Bowers, I identify as farmer and rural.

We farm in Linn and Lane counties as well as operating a grass seed cleaning facility. Between these two operations we have 6 year-around non-family member employees who we pay family wages as well as offer paid vacation, paid sick time, health insurance coverage for the entire family and retirement.

Just like every farming and ranching operation our work is seasonal. In our instance, July through September is our busiest because it's the time of year we harvest our crops, our paycheck for the year that needs to pay all our bills including our employees. Our paycheck is dictated by weather, the global marketplace, regulations, and labor.

During harvest between the farm and the warehouse we hire around 18-20 seasonal workers, mostly who are teenagers and college students. They earn enough money during this time that they can cover books and clothing costs that they do not have to work year around. We enjoy employing these workers and help setting them up for success in their lives & future. However, there is a certain point where wages become unsustainable and negatively impact our operations.

Since the minimum wage increase has been implemented, we have consciously limited hours of employees. For us that means, starting them later in the morning, or only having one or two season employees to come into service the equipment. After harvest is done, we would typically have them drive tractor for us in August and do other odd jobs around the farm, we have minimized this work as much as possible to not stretch our budget, running on operations with the bare minimum employees.

With the imposed mandatory overtime for farmworkers, we would look to limit hours more and mechanize even more. In our seed cleaning operation, we have contemplated adding an additional robot, which would immediately eliminate 3 employees from our harvest schedule.

I take pride in my employees and the environment we create for them even during our busiest times. However, I also must ensure that we can remain sustainable as a business, so they continue to have jobs to provide for their families.

The Oregon Legislature continually erodes at my family's ability to be viable and sustainable as a business and this is just one more nail in Oregon family farms and ranches coffin. Please oppose a 40-hour overtime mandate for Oregon agriculture under HB 4002.