

Date: February 9, 2022
To: House Committee on Business and Labor
From: Jamie McLeod-Skinner
Re: Support for Farmworker Overtime - HB 4002

Chair Holvey, Vice Chairs Bonham and Grayber, and Members of the House Business and Labor Committee,

My name is Jamie McLeod-Skinner, I live in Terrebonne, Oregon, and I am writing on my own behalf, as an Oregonian concerned about finding a viable path forward for our rural and agricultural communities.

I am writing in support of HB 4002 for farmworker overtime.

At the onset I ask that you don't let this to evolve into a farmworker versus farmer argument, we will all be the lesser for it. This needs to be an "and" not an "or" discussion.

The fact of the matter is that farmworkers -- those whose hands pick the food that feeds our own families-- are some of the lowest paid workers in Oregon. Their exhausting work can include dangerous conditions, with intense weather conditions and heavy machinery. Throughout this pandemic, they have been some of our most essential workers, putting food on our tables while dealing with the added health risks of COVID to themselves and their families. Farmworkers deserve the dignity, respect, and right to be classified like other workers in our state. And they should be able to make enough to put food on their own family's table.

It is also a fact that our small family farmers work hard every day, often struggling to make ends meet. The persistent drought threatens their livelihood and generational homes, and fluctuating market prices can undermine even a good year. Those running small, family-owned farms deserve respect, too, as they are being run into the ground by large corporate farms.

In addition to providing farmworker overtime, this discussion needs to include how our state -- and our federal -- legislators can both ensure farmworkers access to fair wages which should include overtime while also providing support for those small, family-owned farms who experience honest impact from this legislation.

This is not an issue that should be dividing us along party lines. I have seen my most conservative and liberal neighbors both honor a farmerworker's commitment to provide for their family while demonstrating their protectiveness of our small family farmers. Oregonians have been in this situation before, when there has been an effort to pit us against each other, to divide and conquer us. But I have faith in our ability to work together and demonstrate a fundamental decency to those whose hands and farms feed our families.

We know that farmworkers are some of the most vulnerable in our economy, with approximately 20% of farmworker families living below the federal poverty level. It's the job of legislators to ensure that government works for all our neighbors. The working poor in our communities deserve the same fair wage and hour rules as everyone else -- that's what this bill provides.

And for those small farmers who are concerned that these increased wages could devastate their family farm, I again turn to you, our state legislators. I challenge you to develop a funding package that would fill the gap for small, family-owned farms who are working every day to make ends meet. I would argue that this is also a role for our federal legislators.

Finding a solution that meets the needs of everyone in our community isn't always the easy path, but it's the right path. We can start this process by making sure that our farmworkers have the guarantee other workers do – to be fairly compensated for their labor.

We need to be respecting and paying fair wages to our workforce, *and* we must also be working with our small farmers to help them do the right thing while keeping their own business – and their families – afloat. I am confident that the leadership of this Committee is the right combination of legislators to make this happen. I believe in our potential for decency. It starts with passing this legislation.

I urge you to pass HB 4002 farmworker overtime in the 2022 Legislative Session to ensure farmworkers in Oregon are paid fairly for their essential labor.

Sincerely,

Jamie McLeod-Skinner
Terrebonne, Oregon