



Ben Verhoeven, President, Peoria Gardens, Inc.
Albany, Oregon
In Support of Overtime Pay for Agricultural workers
Tuesday, February 8, 2022

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

Hello there. I'm Ben Verhoeven. I'm a second generation farmer, and I run a family owned nursery in Albany, Oregon. I'm proud to say my employees receive great benefits, including 12 weeks of paid parental leave, full health care, 5 weeks of paid time off, a pension, and overtime, above 40 hours a week at time-and-a-half. I support overtime for all ag workers.

At our farm and nursery spring is our harvest. As any farmer will tell you, you've got to make hay while the sun shines. That means long hours. In order for my business to survive I need folks to stay until the job is done. In order for my employees' families to thrive they need to be compensated for their extra time and effort.

Plenty of other industries have peak seasons, and we've recognized that their workers deserve overtime. Is it fair that a mother, working on a farm, is excluded from overtime pay, during the long days of harvest, while her son is paid overtime driving an Amazon truck during the Christmas rush?

When it comes to finding and keeping workers, nurseries like ours compete against the Amazons of the world. Paying overtime at our farm levels the playing field.

Is labor a significant cost for us? Yes, absolutely. When my costs go up, am I able to raise my prices? Yes, absolutely. Our market has proven it can bear the cost of compensating its workforce, while still keeping farms like ours healthy and profitable.

It all comes down to balancing costs with fairness. I personally understand the costs. They come out of my pocket. I also understand the fairness that the hard, sometimes dangerous, work of agriculture; the work we have recently recognized as essential, should be compensated like any other job. Compensated with overtime, at time and a half.

Thank you.