

Submitter: Josh Zielinski

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Farm Worker Overtime

Measure: HB4002

Members of the Joint Committee On Farmworker Overtime,

Thank you for reading my testimony today. I am a 5th generation farmer/nurseryman in Salem, Oregon. I chose to follow the footsteps before me and help run my family's nursery, Alpha Nursery, despite the long hours it requires at times because I love what I do. The truth is many of our employees, many of whom have worked for us for over 15 to 20 years, do too. We all know that some days will be shorter and some will be longer. We work in harmony with weather conditions, daylight hours, and crop demands. Creating a living product that makes the world a better place takes extra hours but is ultimately a beautiful way to earn a living. We couldn't be in a better place to do this than Oregon but little by little that is changing due to bill after bill that our legislature throws at us and then "ghosts" at the negotiation table where bills that truly benefit everyone were historically brokered.

The farmers and farmworkers in Oregon need this committee to make a choice regarding HB4002. Without compromise or consideration farmer backed alternatives to the bill I am certain that a 40 hour overtime threshold will have a negative economic impact on both farming operations and their employees. The negative economic impact on the state's economy has been outlined in at least one independent study (Highland study). We will be forced to scale back on labor intense crops (including organics, berries, grapes, forests) and more specifically to our business the specialty ornamental nursery crops that Oregon is famous for which has much broader impacts than it may seem: without these items will buyers across the US need what we have to offer?

Perhaps even worse than hurting farm businesses is the fact that farmworkers will be faced with reduced take home pay as hours will undoubtedly be cut to threshold level the way they are in virtually every industry with 40 hour standard. This is happening now in California and I have seen it first hand: I have hired some recent transplants from California's Central Valley recently. They tell me farmworkers are moving to Oregon and other states because they cannot live the lifestyle they want on 40 hour work weeks and that is what farmers there are scaling back to as their law forces them. Growers in California that I have spoken with say that they are growing less lucrative, specialty crops that often require more labor and scaling back their operations despite high demand for those products. They also report that many of their employees are now working multiple jobs and facing exhaustion to make ends meet the way they were accustomed to while working typical farm hours in just one good job.

The nursery industry, and agriculture in general, competes on a national, if not international, scale where we work hard to maximize quality and yields to sell at market rates. Oregon is ideal growing climate helps tremendously but the costs of doing business here already put us at a competitive disadvantage. It is imperative that if we want to continue to have a strong and diversified agriculture sector in rural Oregon than the voices of those working and living there be heard: there must be compromise!

Please leave out complicated tax credits and take into consideration the proposals by agriculture coalition(s) who understand what it as stake with this bill's passage.

Again, thank you for listening to/reading my testimony today.

Sincerely,  
Josh Zielinski  
Alpha Nursery