

To: Joint Committee on Farm Worker Overtime
Ag Overtime Hearing Feb 24, 2022
From: Mike McCarthy, McCarthy Family Farm

Committee Chairs Taylor and Holvey and Members of the Joint Committee:

I oppose HB4002A and amendments. I farm in Hood River County and raise apples, pears, cherries and peaches, like many in Hood River and Wasco counties. These are all very labor intensive crops: 60% of our expenses are for labor.

As I look at the committee members and those testifying in favor of the bill, I realize that I have been a dedicated Democrat longer than any of you. Hard to believe but when I think about it, I have been a Democrat for 50 years. I come from a family of democratic political activists, environmental activists and racial justice advocates. OSPIRG, Earth Justice, 1000 Friends, Friends of the Gorge, Oregon Environmental Counsel, Immigration Counseling Service and Social Justice in North Portland and more. Google them. I really object to the characterization by some of farmers and the farm work place. They know nothing about us.

The reason I say all of this above, is that this is not a partisan issue. This should not be a partisan issue. This is an economic issue. This is just a math issue. This is a “no ability to pay issue” and no ability to get our crops picked. This is simply the Ag economics of farm products (food).

I made a different choice than anyone in my family, maybe a stupid choice, I started a farm in 1980, worked two full time jobs for 17 years, my own farm and as manager of a corporate farm, so I could make my farm payments.

What I soon realized is that farm income in the fruit business is limited and sporadic. Farm income and profit is under more severe pressure than ever in Oregon caused by a higher minimum age, the highest prevailing farm worker wage in the US, unreasonable housing regulations and costs, new heat and smoke rules and costs, CAT tax costs, new fuel regulations and costs, food safety regulations and more. We have had at or near the highest farming costs in the US for years. We are squeezed.

So what I have learned is Progressive idealism does not line up with financial reality on the farm. Progressive Idealism conflicts with financial reality on the farm. Urban theories from an office in Portland are not our reality. Things are different on the ground: commodity prices, frost, hail, wind, insects, rot, mold and a perishable crop.

As Dr. Fauci said at a Senate Hearing recently, “the amount of misinformation is extraordinary”.

The Oregon legislature is not going to change commodity prices received by farmers in Oregon to pay for this. Overtime is not built into the Global Food System to pay for more on labor intense farms in Oregon. We are merely a cog in a massive commodity food market. No ability to “trickle up” our new costs to Walmart. The “trickle up” assumption that our prices will adjust is false. Surprisingly no facts exist to show that farmers can pay for this. Shockingly there is no data to show farmers can pay for this. How can we legislate like this?

\$3800 Net farm income in Hood River County for a whole year.
1200 farms lost in Oregon in the last 5 year period reported.

