

Submitter: Bobbi Harrold
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Labor and Workplace Standards
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2548

Chair Grayber and members of the committee:

For the record my name is Bobbi Harrold and I am a dairy farmer in Lane county. I strongly oppose HB 2548.

Proponents of this bill would have you believe that they are doing a service to farm workers in the state of Oregon with this bill. They want to believe that it will raise wages and protect workers across the state. But what they fail to realize is that however well intentioned, this legislation will ultimately end up costing the Agriculture sector thousands of family wage jobs by killing the farms that provide them. As a 4th generation family farmer, I know the value of having a safe, happy workforce. Make no mistake, I CANNOT FARM WITHOUT MY EMPLOYEES. That is why we have always done our best to provide high wages and strong benefits to support the folks who work with us. The fact that my farm, like countless others, has employees who count their time here in decades, is a testament to this.

HB 2548 takes control of the wages and benefits paid to workers and gives them to an UNELECTED board. NOT, the farmers and owners who understand their unique financial situation. This is a recipe for disaster. To assume all facets of Oregon Agriculture are the same as the others and have the same margins, challenges and profitability is utterly laughable. Grass seed farms are not orchards are not vegetable farms are not livestock operations are not nurseries. Each subset of our incredibly diverse industry faces distinctive challenges, and they handle those challenges differently.

As a Dairyman, I do not have any control over the price paid to my farm for milk. This price is set by the Federal Government. Often, this price is significantly lower than the cost of producing milk. Controlling costs while keeping my employees happy and safe is my job as a Farmer. Why on Earth would the state of Oregon turn over the ability to control my costs to an UNELECTED board of people who DO NOT understand my unique situation?

Most farmers have no control over the price paid for their products. We set wages, as well as hire and shrink our workforce to match the financial challenges we face.

These obstacles fluctuate season to season, if not more often. A wage floor set once every 2 years would be irresponsibly disruptive and damaging. It fails to take account of the global pressures facing farms and how quickly they change. For the record, here is a small list of things we cannot control:

1. Price paid for our crops
2. Weather during growing seasons.
3. Federal trade policies that can upend our markets.
4. The cost of inputs like feed, fuel and supplies that are all tied to shifting global

markets.

5. Oregon's minimum wage, which now readjusts by a different percentage each year.

6. A slowly lowering Ag OT threshold that is estimated to cost Oregon dairy farmers like me at least 20% more each year. (Oregon is one of only 7 states that currently pay Agricultural workers overtime.)

With so much uncertainty in our industry, and the fact that it already costs so much more to farm in Oregon, why would you knowingly take away the flexibility we need to stay in business?

An old saying says that the Farmer is an eternal optimist; he plants seeds with faith that weather and other variables will turn out right and create a profitable crop. I used to consider myself this optimist, I had faith if I worked hard and took care of my people that I would be able to carry on my family legacy and take our farm into its 100th year of business. The past few years of working on behalf of the industry in Oregon have proved to me that this goal is impossible. I need 21 more years of farming to take my farm to its 100th birthday, and each passing year Oregon passes more laws to make sure this doesn't happen. My family, my employees and the land we have loved for 8 decades will all have to find a new home and a new dream, not because we were bad or irresponsible at what we did, but because YOUR red tape slowly strangled us.