

Submitter: Robert Crouse
On Behalf Of: Fort Vannoy Farms Inc Josephine Co Farm Bureau
Committee: House Committee On Labor and Workplace Standards
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2548

I'm asking you to oppose HB 2548 because it threatens my ability to keep farming. Oregon already has some of the highest labor costs in the country, and after several tough years, I can't afford more regulations and wage increases.

The cost of managing a small workforce is killing my farm. I already have to pay an outside consultant to audit my records to be sure I am in compliance of what rules are existing. My office staff is spending more time filling out paperwork to comply, cutting further into my profits. Due to increased wages mandated by the state, I am already eliminating 3/4 of the variety of produce I was growing to sell through my farm stand as they are too labor intensive. By cutting crops I am going to reduce my labor expense by \$150,000 per year. With the increased regulation and possible labor disruptions, chance of having to be have to legally defend myself and losing the ability to hire at will, I will take my operation back to the very basics of crops and farm just cattle feed, hiring 1 or 2 people part time. That would mean I would have to farm fewer acres as there is not a local market for that much feed which will make me even less able to earn a living. This would be a result on my little 400 acre farm.

This bill would give unelected bureaucrats the power to set wages and safety rules that go far beyond current protections, adding more regulatory burden to small farms like mine. Farmers know how devastating this regulatory model is. Oregon's state agencies have adopted very harmful regulations in the last five years with little to no accountability for their actions. This board would be no different; its members aren't even elected.

HB 2548 unfairly targets agriculture by taking away at-will employment, meaning I wouldn't be able to make necessary staffing decisions without the risk of costly lawsuits. One claim can cost tens of thousands of dollars or more. I also don't believe that farms should be forced keep employees who may not meet performance expectations or adapt to the demands of the job. All other sectors in Oregon would be at-will, but farms—whose employment needs are impacted by weather, yields, trade, pests, diseases, etc.—would not. Not only is that unfair, but it will likely result in job loss, not job security.

This bill doesn't help workers or consumers; it just makes farming harder and more expensive. I have already had to manage hours to comply with agricultural overtime, and HB 2548 could force me to make tough operational choices like reducing my workforce, changing crops, automating, or selling the operation.

I just saw the -2 amendment, and it creates a very biased Board. The proposed Board would rubber stamp any new regulation - regardless of farmers' ability to pay. It requires training for all employees and new hires but only allows unions to provide it; I don't understand how that would work for a seasonal workforce. Also, the new amendment allows workers to claim emotional damages and does not even allow farm employers a fair defense, as only plaintiffs' attorneys could recover their fees. It's a recipe for needless and costly litigation against farm families.

I urge you to vote no against this punitive bill to protect local farms and jobs.

Sincerely,
Robert J. Crouse
President Fort Vannoy Farms, Inc.
President Josephine County Farm Bureau