

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO HOUSE BILL 2548

March 12, 2025

To: House Committee on Labor and Workplace Standards

My name is Larry Bailey, and my wife and I operate a tree nursery in East Multnomah County. I am also the President of Multnomah County Farm Bureau, and I am writing to you today on behalf of our farming members.

I urge you to oppose House Bill 2548. This bill creates an unelected Agricultural Workplace Standards Board ('Board') that will have far-reaching power over the livelihoods of our farm families and will negatively impact our entire farming community.

According to the Oregon Department of Agriculture, 96% of Oregon's approximately 35,000 farms are family-owned¹. In addition, the majority of the state's farms are small-acreage, with farms of less than 10 acres in size accounting for 32% of the total and fully 67% of the farms in the state being less than 50 acres in size².

Such small, family-owned operations do not have the luxury of paid staff whose sole job is to ensure compliance with Oregon's already aggressive regulatory burdens. Instead, they generally rely upon the owners themselves to navigate these matters, as is the case for our farm.

This means that we must take time away from the "real" work of the farm to learn, and comply with, all regulations that the Board might choose to enact. The wide-ranging, and somewhat arbitrary, powers of the Board, together with its ability to enact additional regulation without legislative review, will make it nearly impossible for our small family farms to thrive, instead forcing them to focus their already limited resources on the whims of the Board.

I once asked a Farm Bureau member and good friend of mine, who is a first-generation American and who recently purchased his own farm, what some of his most significant challenges were. His answer, which initially was surprising to me, was "farming legally." In saying this, my friend was not implying that he wanted to do things illegally. Quite the opposite. He went on to explain that he was working diligently to ensure that he did everything "right." However, even with 20 years of experience in the farming industry, he still found it nearly impossible to understand all relevant regulations and be sure that he

was in compliance. If House Bill 2548 is enacted, my friend's situation will only become worse. This will be the case for all farmers in the state but will be especially impactful to small farms and new farmers. At some point, the costs of doing business and the barriers to entry simply become too great.

Speaking of family farms, it is important to emphasize that these types of operations typically treat their employees "like family." When one of our workers recently retired and moved back to Mexico, he told me, with tears in his eyes, "thank you for letting me be part of your family." In my experience, this is the norm, not the exception, and I would be happy to introduce you to a number of successful farmers who started out as farm laborers and were helped along on their path to success by their employer.

The provisions of House Bill 2548 seem to infer that agricultural employers somehow treat their employees differently from other employers (and in a negative way). Otherwise, why would there be a need for agriculture-specific workplace standards, wage rates, and the like. I strongly believe that if there are bad actors in any industry, these bad actors should be held accountable for their actions. However, it is fundamentally irresponsible to upend and destabilize an entire industry based solely on the implication that bad actors may exist. Please devote the state's resources to enforcing existing laws, of which there are myriad³, as opposed to saddling or agricultural community with even more burdensome regulations.

Respectfully submitted,

Larry Bailey
President, Multnomah County Farm Bureau

1. [https://www.oregon.gov/oda/about-us/pages/default.aspx#:~:text=The%20Oregon%20Department%20of%20Agriculture%20\(ODA\)%20serves%20over%2035%2C000%20farms,to%20share%20Oregon's%20bountiful%20harvest](https://www.oregon.gov/oda/about-us/pages/default.aspx#:~:text=The%20Oregon%20Department%20of%20Agriculture%20(ODA)%20serves%20over%2035%2C000%20farms,to%20share%20Oregon's%20bountiful%20harvest)
2. <https://extension.oregonstate.edu/business-economics/rural-development/oregon-agriculture-numbers-part-2-distribution-farms-acreage#:~:text=A%20majority%20of%20the%2035%2C547,for%2035%25%20of%20all%20farms>
3. See 'Existing Worker Protections FAQ' submitted to this committee by Jenny Dresler with Oregon Farm Bureau