

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

Members of the Committee,

My name is Matthew Brady, I am a fifth-generation farmer in Azalea, Oregon where I continue to steward the land as my family has for 132 years. I was born into a farming legacy, but I have chosen this vocation out of love of the work, and the land.

I urge you to consider the words of the Farmers and Ranchers of Oregon and Oppose HB2548.

It has been stated in testimony in support of this bill that consolidation in the agriculture industry has led to a power inequality between farm workers and their employees. I ask what is driving that consolidation. Is it the fact that even with strong land use laws that attempt to protect farmland, our state lost 667,00 acres to conversion to other uses between 2017 and 2022? Is it a fact that farmers are price takers, as the old adage says "buying retail, selling wholesale, and paying shipping both ways"? Is it the fact that Oregon has developed a regulatory environment that is hostile to farms of all sizes and business structure, whereby Oregon farmers on average made 67% less cash income than the National average in 2022?

I will not dispute that there are individuals in the farming and ranching communities that take advantage of their employees, and exploit the perceived power inequality they may have. But I have never witnessed it personally. The farmers and ranchers that I know & love care about their employees. They work alongside them in the sweltering heat, and freezing cold, often choosing the worst duties for themselves, so their employees don't have to do them. They care about their employees' families. They lay awake at night wondering how they will make ends meet, and if they can continue to afford employees on their operations.

All that said, HB2548 will only further exacerbate the purported divide between farm workers and their employers. It is going to increase labor costs, decrease flexibility to harvest highly perishable crops, shift burden of proof for termination to employers, and increase likelihood of litigation. All of these will affect farmers' bottom lines. Some farms will not be able to survive the effects of HB2548. They will go out of business, fueling the consolidation of the farming sector. But worst of all, it will foster sterile relationships between workers and employers. Our State and Nation need more compassion and understanding, and the natural outworking of this bill will be diametrically opposed to those ends.

Vote NO on HB 2548!