

Dear Chair Grayber, Vice-Chairs Elmer and Muñoz, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Emileni Lopez, and I am the proud daughter of one of the most loving, kind, resilient, and hardworking men I know—my father. Today, I am writing in strong support of HB 2548, the Farmworker Standards Board. A necessary bill that not only propels agriculture forward but offers the opportunity to heal the deep-seated injustices that have plagued the industry for far too long.

As the daughter of a lifelong farmworker, I have witnessed firsthand the struggle that comes with working in this country's agriculture industry. Day in and day out, farmworkers give everything to put food on our tables and keep a roof over their families' heads. Yet, despite their immense contributions, over \$6.4 BILLION to Oregon's economy to be precise, they endure grueling labor, harsh working conditions, a meager average wage of \$34,000 annually, and an uncompensated sacrifice of their health and well-being. Employers are acutely aware that farm workers are skilled, essential, and even suggest they are "part of their family", but let's get one thing crystal clear: if farmworkers were truly seen as part of farm owners' families, their well-being would be prioritized. No family member would be expected to sacrifice their health, their safety, and their future for such meager compensation and downright exploitation. However, this is precisely what farmworkers are forced to endure every single day.

It's time we confront an uncomfortable truth: the agricultural industry profits off the backs of farmworkers, while they receive next to nothing in return. Farmworkers are essential to sustaining our food system and feeding this nation, yet they are denied basic rights and protections that most other workers are granted; safe working conditions, a livable wage, healthcare, the right to organize, and until recently, overtime pay. This is not an accident. Since the 1930s, farmworkers have been explicitly excluded from critical labor protections, leaving them among the lowest-paid and most vulnerable workers in the country.

The fact that the average life expectancy of a farmworker is just 49 years old is appalling. This statistic is not just a number, it is a glaring consequence of a broken system that continues to exploit people. This system expects farmworkers to sacrifice their bodies, their health, and their dreams just to survive, and that should make every one of us uncomfortable.

These stark realities highlight the urgent need for change. Just like many farm owners, my family and thousands of others have made sacrifices for a better future. However, unlike farm owners, farmworkers often do not have the opportunity to comfortably survive, let alone thrive. It is time to acknowledge the depth of this disparity and take action.

To those who argue that farm owners cannot afford to treat farmworkers better, I urge you to understand that this is not just an economic issue, it is a matter of justice. Farmworkers have been excluded from the very conversations that affect their lives. The argument that farm owners

cannot afford to improve working conditions is short-sighted and misses the point entirely. There is no legitimate excuse for continuing to exploit farmworkers.

Farmworkers are demanding what every worker deserves: a livable wage, safe working conditions, job security, and dignity. Why should they be denied these basic rights when they are the ones who keep the agricultural system functioning? Without them, we do not eat. We do not survive.

To farm owners, I would ask you to consider; instead of blaming farmworkers for their own oppression, let's ask why we have accepted a system that denies farmworkers the dignity of a livable wage. The power structures that benefit from this exploitation need to be confronted. Improving conditions for farmworkers will benefit everyone in the long run. If you, too, are struggling in this system, now is the time to change it, not to double down on its flaws. You are part of this system. Let us work together to demand a system that ensures all workers and farm owners can thrive. Together, we can protect the agricultural industry this country depends on.

This is where HB 2548 comes in. This is not simply another bill, it is a chance to begin correcting decades of injustice and working toward a vibrant collective future where no one is left behind. The Farmworker Standards Board offers a path toward real change, where farmworkers will finally have the protections they deserve. It is a step toward fairness, safety, and dignity, one where workers and farm owners can join forces to build a better future for everyone involved.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I strongly urge you to support HB 2548 and take a stand for justice, dignity, and the future of our agricultural communities.

With much hope for a better future,

Emileni Lopez