

Since September 2020, I have been working as a COVID-19 contact tracer in Marion County. My job is to call people and notify them when they have been exposed to COVID-19, and make sure they understand how long they need to quarantine. I also help connect them with social services and financial support if they are unable to take care of their needs by themselves without violating quarantine. Many of the people that I call on a daily basis are Agricultural workers. While I offer support and services to every person I contact, accepting that support is optional but almost every single agricultural worker I spoke with was overjoyed to hear about even the possibility of financial assistance. The idea of losing out on 10 days worth of wages was terrifying to them because these are some of the most vulnerable underpaid people in our state. I've had many difficult conversations with agricultural workers unsure of how they would be able to feed their families, pay rent, or keep the lights on if they had to miss work to quarantine. These people don't have rainy day funds put aside to help them get through tough times because our state and our country has been consistently undervaluing their labor for generations.

Agricultural workers are essential workers. Without them, we don't have food to put on the table. This job has shown me how the most vulnerable people in our society are also often the most harshly impacted by disasters like the COVID-19 pandemic. These people deserve to be paid overtime because that is the right thing to do. We shouldn't allow employers to make their employees work extra hours without pay in any industry, but the fact that an industry so integral to the well being of every Oregonian does not yet have these basic protections is absurd. I urge the House Committee on Business and labor to support this legislation, and move it forward for a full vote in the House.