

My name is Lesley Tamura and I grow pears in Hood River County. I am the 4th generation of my family to operate our orchard. Oregon had the greatest increase of all Western states in farm bankruptcies in the past year. Profit margins are so thin in agriculture that they are practically nonexistent. As a farmer, I am a price taker. We do not set the prices for our products like most businesses, we are forced to accept the prices offered to us by the grocery stores buying our fruit, and if we do not take them then they simply purchase from other states or countries that sell at a cheaper price. Our income is earned from wholesale fruit prices of between 10 and 25 cents per pound, but we pay retail prices for everything we need to run our operation and some of the highest labor costs in the country. This is the economic reality of farming.

The intention of this bill is to help farmworkers, but it will actually hurt them. In order to stay in business, we will have no choice but to limit hours per employee to 40 per week as much as possible to avoid overtime costs. This reduces take home pay for employees, and that means that employees will actually be earning less if this bill passes than they were before. Most employees do not work long hours per day (8-9 hours per day is common during the busy seasons, including harvest), but some seasonal work dictates working more than 5 days per week. If limited to 40 hours per week, many employees will quit due to lost earnings, or try to find second jobs to supplement their limited hours, leading to working days in the orchard operations and then night shifts elsewhere. Farmworkers rely on working extra days during peak seasons in order to offset the seasons when there is not as much work. For those times that we cannot limit hours to 40 per week, we would need to look for other ways to offset the additional overtime costs. This might include freezing wages, not offering bonuses, etc. For those operations that offer health or retirement benefits, these would most likely be reduced or removed entirely.

One important way agriculture is unique is that many farmworkers across the state receive housing provided by their employers. This housing is often provided free of charge; employees do not pay rent, nor do they pay for the cost of utilities. In many cases we are providing housing not only for our employees, but for the employees' spouses and children as well. We are paying the cost of housing and utilities for entire families while only one member of that family works for our operation. This employee benefit can be worth up to \$10.00 per hour in addition to their paid wages. In any other industry, offering such an important and expensive benefit would be considered part of employees' pay, and wages/salaries would be adjusted accordingly. Agriculture should be no different. It is unfair for anyone to expect that we can afford to provide expensive housing benefits AND overtime pay.

Work schedules in agriculture are dictated by the weather conditions we are given. We have limited windows of time to complete certain tasks and must take advantage when weather allows. During pear harvest we have 18 days to pick the entire crop, whether it's 15 acres or 200 acres. If the weather is warm and pears are ripening faster, we have less time. If we get a rainy day during harvest we don't pick; this means we lose that day and cannot make it up later. This sort of time requirement often leads to working 6 or 7 days a week during harvest season.

I know it is not the goal of HB 2358 to reduce take-home pay for farmworkers, but this bill demands wages that are not possible. If HB 2358 passes, farmworkers will suffer from lost hours and wages. Please vote NO on HB 2358 this session, and then take the time to work with stakeholders in the agricultural industry to create a plan that truly will benefit farmworkers and not bankrupt the family farms that are such an important part of Oregon.