

3/8/21

My name is Dana Estensen and I farm wine grapes in Marion and Yamhill counties. I want to share with you my concerns about the real impact of HB 2358 on both my farm and my employees. I would ask that the committee vote NO on HB 2358.

Agricultural production has a unique, seasonal nature, affecting both the total period when agricultural activities can be pursued and the days within the "season" when work can be performed. Vineyards are considered a specialty crop with high hand labor requirements. On average, a grapevine will be touched at least 9 times per year by a crew member in a vineyard that also uses mechanization to replace hand labor. Depending on the year, a crew might go through a vineyard at least 3 – 4 more times.

Timely completion of vineyard hand labor tasks is critical for crop health, lower disease pressure, fruit quality and the ability to use equipment efficiently. Highest demand for hand labor is the period of Jan – early March for pruning and May – June when the vines are experiencing rapid shoot growth. Most of our hand labor is done by contract crews. We ramp up to close to 100 contractor employees during these peak times but during the off season rely on our 16 full time employees (supervisors and equipment operators) who work year-round. Our full-time employees receive health benefits (including dental and vision), PTO (paid time off), Holiday pay and 401k.

We are as highly mechanized as we can be and are always on the lookout for more ways to mechanize our vineyard work. Being successful at mechanization requires that the vineyard infrastructure is set up properly and you have skilled equipment operators. Good, mechanized options for pruning, shoot thinning, lifting wires, and other tasks are not available for use in our vineyards currently.

Labor costs are already 70% of our budget. Paying overtime after a 40-hour work week would increase our costs by 10% and that doesn't include any increases based on this proposed bill that would affect our salaried employees. We cannot afford that, and it will be detrimental to our employees and contract labor as well as our vineyards. Employees won't be making more money but would be asked to work less hours or staggered shifts if possible.

We wouldn't be able to directly pass any additional costs on to the wineries that purchase our grapes. Farmers are price takers; we can't simply increase the cost for our crops to account for added labor costs. The agricultural industry has already been severely challenged and affected by COVID-19 as well as the devastating wildfires and the February ice storm. Because of the wildfires and smoke, in our vineyards we didn't harvest 80% of our wine grapes in 2020 and many other growers were similarly (and some cases more severely) affected. Agricultural is at the breaking point.

At this point in the process, I would request that the committee vote **NO** on HB 2358. This bill would negatively impact not only farmers and ranchers in Oregon, but also agricultural workers!