

March 8, 2021

SUBJECT: Letter Opposing House Bill 2358

Dear Chair Holvey, Vice-Chairs Bonham and Grayber and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to share my OPPOSITION FOR HB 2358.

Thank you for taking the time to meet today as the House Committee on Business and Labor. I am a fourth-generation Oregon agriculturalist and a member of Farm Bureau. I currently work as the Assistant General Manager of Snake River Produce Co., LLC – an onion packing facility located in Nyssa, Oregon – along the far eastern border near Idaho. Snake River Produce is 80% grower owned, and represents a number of onion growers in the Idaho-Eastern Oregon Onion Growing Region and I feel compelled to write upon their behalf.

Snake River Produce packs and ships dry bulb onions all throughout the United States as well as Canada, Mexico and occasionally other countries. The onion markets – as well as markets for other agricultural commodities – are global. Costs for farmers in Mexico are substantially lower than those of their USA counterparts, partially because the wages in Mexico are so low. As a result, low-priced onions from Mexico pour into the United States, making it more difficult to achieve a profit because of the increased supply overall. More supply without increased demand results in a drop in the price, and ultimately a drop in the return to grower. To maintain competitiveness with imported onions, our onion growers cannot sustain additional costs to production. Certainly, onion production is just one example of many that would be negatively impacted by HB 2358. Your Oregon farmers depend on you to protect this overtime exemption and oppose HB 2358.

HB 2358 would be detrimental to farmers and ranchers all throughout Oregon. HB 2358 proposes the most aggressive overtime policy in the country, which would be devastating for local farmers and their employees, who are already struggling financially. Currently, agriculture is exempt from overtime pay under the federal Fair Labor Standards Act and in most other states because of the unique seasonal nature of agricultural production, affecting both the total period when agricultural activities can be pursued and the days within the “season” when work can be performed.

Our growers cannot simply increase the sale price of their crops to account for added labor costs. As someone who sells onions every day, I can assure you – I cannot simply raise the price. The market is complex and depends on a global supply and demand economic situation. The prices are set by the market. Support of HB2358 will simply add one more cost to the burden of farming, adding increased stress on their business. It is increasingly frustrating to watch the State of Oregon add regulations and costs to agricultural pursuits – when our State claims to serve and enhance Oregon’s diverse agricultural and food sectors.

HB 2358 demands wages that are not possible with the economics of agriculture and will result in reduced pay and hours for farm employees. I am very concerned this policy has not been well-vetted and will actually harm those it intends to help. Please oppose HB 2358. This bill would negatively impact not only family farmers and ranchers in Oregon, but all agricultural workers.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Cruickshank
Assistant General Manager
Snake River Produce Co., LLC