

My name is Karen Finley , I run a honey beekeeping business in Linn/Benton/Lane counties. We have been a family farm business for over 25 years.

Thankyou for the oppourtunity to speak in opposition to the proposed mandated overtime pay.

Like much of Oregon agriculture, we have work that is seasonally changing, dynamic, and time and weather dependent. We rely on our staff to be highly skilled, healthy, reliable and nimble. We have built our business by emphasizing good compensation, safety, and fair treatment of our team of employees. We reward longevity, experience, reliability, and skill building. We offer the wages it takes to attract and retain good employees.

I think, at its best, agriculture is labor intensive. It is work done best by people and not machines. I do not know of any farms that are not sincerely interested in the personal and financial success of their employees. We measure our prosperity by the prosperity of our workforce. 48 hour weeks are the norm for most of the employees in our business for at least a half of the year. While we adapt to employees who desire fewer hours, part of the job requires many hands pitching in to finish a task in a timely manner. We need to add Saturdays or work longer days. We start people at 15 or 16 an hour and (currently) top out at 23 an hour. We provide 2 weeks of paid time off in the off season, and 5 days of paid sick/family leave. Like many ag employers, we use bonuses and/or provide housing on top of wages. We have 8-12 employees, with 8 of them year round permanent employees, with summer helpers in the honey extracting room.

And, we absolutely cannot economically afford to pay overtime on a 40 hour week. A quick calculation makes it an increase to our payroll of over 25,000 dollars a year.

Mandatory overtime is in conflict with the reality of agricultural hiring. We just cannot afford it, and it is an awkward fit for farming businesses like mine. It just isn't possible to predict workers' hours and pay a salary, or to add an afternoon crew, or temporary employees, to finish a task. We would have to restructure our wages entirely and considerably lower the hourly wage rate we offer to add back the overtime pay. This would create confusion. It would defeat and destabilize us. We would permanently lose the talent of our best trained employees. Our work environment, bees, and business bottom line would suffer. This is not the way to increase wages in agriculture.

Oregon ag employers and employees are professional people who need to be trusted to make good employment decisions. We cannot afford to increase our wages, and we are not able to "pass along" the extra costs to the consumer. We can't just close each day at a predictable hour. What is predictable to us is the rain and the sun, but not how much and when it's going to happen. We operate on the larger turn of the seasons, with times that demand a lot of extra work and times to balance that with rest.

As producers, we really are making choices that promote the success of our families and of our employees and their families. Mandatory overtime pay would be unaffordable for our business and require us to entirely change the structure of our compensation. We are paying what we can afford, and want to be trusted for our sound judgement as employers.

I understand the goals that you may have for worker "justice" and prosperity, which I share, but I am confident that implementing a mandatory overtime pay is not the means to achieve this. Oregon agricultural workers are better supported by providing ag businesses with economic and regulatory stability, a trained workforce, and health care and education for them and their families. Support for ag workers will certainly come best from the recent increase in child tax credit and immigration reform.