

My name is Chris Wells. I am part of the 5th generation to live on our farm and 4th generation in an organized farming business, which is a family century farm as of 2001. Over the generations, the labor force that has worked in our agricultural business has changed. Prices used to make agriculture an incredible opportunity. I grew up hearing how you used to spend 10 cents to make a dollar, and how it shifted to spending a dollar to make a dollar. Today our outlook is even more strained. Most years it is hard to break even and we rely on good relations with financial institutions to help see us through to the good years to bring things back to even.

Even the quickest calculations of what overtime in agriculture (HB 2358) would do to us shows that we simply can not afford it. Employees who look forward to working longer hours to increase wages over 40 hours per week during more intense parts of the year will no longer have this opportunity, as our response to HB 2358, should it pass, would not be to pay out the additional wages, but rather to cut hours down to 40 hours per week maximum allowed. This is not about the farm owner trying to keep wages away from employees. Let me be clear, HB 2358 is another proposed policy that instead of protecting workers will hurt workers due to decreased hours. The logic in this bill is flawed and backwards. Although this example is unrelated to HB 2358, it is much like cutting farm housing capacity in half or more, in order to protect laborers from COVID-19, when in reality it caused many to have to find their own housing by living in vehicles and overcrowding non-farm housing with friends or relatives. These impacts on agriculture just can't continue. How many more proposals and rules will be made that actually harm the target employee due to farm owners needing to meet compliance instead of helping the employee as they were intended to do?

I strongly oppose HB2358, as our family wishes to stay in business. Propositions and Bills such as this continue to choke out smaller family farms and pave the way for continued stepping in by only the large powerhouse businesses to take over. Lets not do to farming what we have done to the many small businesses that have failed due to competition with the large (big-box) store chains in local economies. I urge the legislators to not look at this from a partisan perspective. This is not about party lines or protecting the employees anymore. This is about survival of small farms and not actually harming those the law was intended to help.