

•My name is Walter Lierman and I am farm in Marion county. I grow/raise Blueberries and Hazelnuts, and employ up to 200 contract laborers, many of whom come back to my farm year after year. I want to share with you my concerns about the real impact of HB 2358 on both my farm and my employees, which is scheduled for a public hearing in the House Business and Labor Committee on March 29th.

•HB 2358 would require every farm and ranch in Oregon to pay overtime to employees after 40 hours of work, with no exceptions or consideration of peak season. This is the most aggressive overtime policy in the country, which would be devastating for local farmers and our employees.

•This bill would add a great recordkeeping burden on our business and hurts the very people that this bill seems to want to help. During harvest, our contract laborers are paid at a piece rate and earn a majority of their annual income during the harvest season. During the peak of harvest and if the weather permits, they work seven days a week, and work as long as we allow. Due to our slim margins, we cannot afford to pay an overtime rate. This means that the people doing the harvest will work less and make less. This also means that our harvest will take longer, which would likely result in smaller crew sizes because the available workers will need to be spread across more farms. This also would result in lower quality fruit, due to some of the fruit not being harvested at the optimal time.

•I want to do everything I can to keep my employees happy and coming back to my farm, but as a farmer, I am a price taker. This means that I cannot simply increase the sale price of my crops to account for added labor costs. Consumers set our prices and will buy from other states or countries that sell at a cheaper price. I will have to absorb any added overhead. That's the economic reality I deal with every day. This is why we have seen many food processors move out of state in recent years.

•To stay in business, I will be forced to limit the number of hours worked by my employees to 40 hours in a week to avoid the added expense of overtime pay. I do not want to do this, and my employees do not want me to do this, but that is the practical reality of this bill.

•Farmers and ranchers will have to mechanize operations, transition to less labor-intensive crops, or even move outside of Oregon to stay in business, which is what we are considering right now. Farm employees are at risk of losing their jobs if downsizing, switching crops, or mechanizing are the only options available to a farm or ranch.

•As a family business, we can't operate at a loss year-over-year, so we have to control costs which are increasing every year in Oregon. I know it's not the goal of this bill to reduce employee take-home pay, but 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 that this policy hasn't been well-vetted and that the members supporting this bill do not understand that this will actually harm those it intends to help.

•Please oppose HB 2358 this session. This bill will negatively impact not only family farmers and ranchers in Oregon, but also agricultural workers!