

2/7/2022

To: House Committee on Business and Labor
From: Rogue Farm Corps
Re: Support for Farmworker Overtime



ROGUE FARM CORPS

Chair Holvey, Vice Chairs Bonham and Grayber, and Members of the House Business and Labor Committee,

My name is Abigail Singer and I am writing on behalf of Rogue Farm Corps, a state-wide nonprofit organization training and equipping the next generation of Oregon's farmers and ranchers. Rogue Farm Corps (RFC) was founded in the Rogue Valley in 2004, and since that time we have partnered with dozens of farmers and ranchers across the state to mentor the next generation so they can continue to feed our communities and steward our working lands. Rooted in Oregon's agricultural communities, RFC serves beginning farmers and ranchers who seek hands-on training, technical assistance, and an entry point into a career in agriculture.

I am writing to you today to express Rogue Farm Corps' support for farmworker overtime. Farmworkers should receive overtime pay after 40 hours in a workweek at one and one-half times the employee's regular rate of pay.

Farmworkers have been excluded from minimum wage protections, child labor laws, and overtime pay since the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938. This Jim Crow-era exclusion for agricultural workers has been a racist policy from the beginning, and it is past time to allow farmworkers the same labor rights that every other worker is entitled to.

Farmworkers do skilled, demanding, and sometimes dangerous work to grow our food, yet they are some of the lowest paid workers in Oregon with a median income of \$28,000 a year. This is unacceptable. Farmworkers do incredibly important work and they deserve respect, dignity, labor rights, and the ability to earn a livable wage.

RFC is aware there is a diversity of opinion on farmworker overtime within the agricultural community. We recognize that making financial ends meet can be difficult for many farmers, farm owners and employers included. However, the economic challenges and shortcomings of our food system cannot be balanced on the backs of those who work the hardest and have been the most exploited. To continue the status quo would be to uphold the racist legacy of Jim Crow exclusionary laws.

Farmworkers are frontline workers who continue to show up to put food on the table despite facing a respiratory pandemic, wildfires, winter storms and deadly heat waves. Overtime pay was created to discourage employers from overworking employees, and it is just as necessary in the agricultural sector as elsewhere. Farmworkers deserve to spend time with their families, to be able to tend to other responsibilities, and to make a livable wage.

I urge you to pass farmworker overtime in the 2022 Legislative Session, with as short of a phase-in timeline as possible, to ensure farmworkers in Oregon are paid fairly for their skilled and essential labor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Singer', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Abigail Singer
Executive Director
Rogue Farm Corps