

Submitter: Mary Alionis
On Behalf Of: Whistling Duck Farm LLC
Committee: House Committee On Business and Labor
Measure: HB4002

Greetings Representatives,

My husband Vince and I have a family farm in Southern Oregon, which we started in 1991. We now have a certified organic farm, store, kitchen, and online seed garlic enterprise. Our adult daughter also works with us, making this a multigenerational farm.

With regard to Bill HB4002:

1. Farm workers are in very short supply, and the ones that are here want to work more than 40 hours a week. The blunt reality is that farmers cannot pay workers overtime in the main season for the long days and long weeks necessary with seasonal work. Farm work is spread out over a full year, with long hours in the main season and short hours, or even furlough, in the off-season. With this law workers would have to get multiple jobs in the main season to have the amount of hours they want to work, in order to maintain their financial viability through the "off-season."
2. Farmers are currently very challenged finding workers, and for them to now be able to only hire workers for 40 hours a week - 8 hours a day in the main season will create severe shortages and logistical challenges. Also, with typical reduced hours off-season, farm workers will be hard pressed to get 2000 hours of work annually without navigating multiple jobs. Additionally, if a farmer has more employees, they will not be able to keep all employed throughout the winter months, and will then need to find new workers, and train them, the following year.
3. Farm product prices have not risen to keep up with current increases in labor prices, even without overtime factored in. Our proximity to Mexico, not too mention Idaho, and the continued importing of foods from places with lower labor costs doesn't bode well for our prices increasing any time soon. For instance, our pay rates have nearly doubled since 2006 and our prices have increased at most 30%, and in some cases far less.
4. The only way I can see farmers managing this, and allowing workers to work the 60+ hours they would prefer to work, would be to lower their base wage (most farmers already pay well over minimum wage) so it would offset the overtime. This would basically force the worker to always work more than 40 hours a week to make the same amount of money they're currently making. This does not seem to be a win for either the farmer or the worker.

5. A much larger employment/employee issue, across all employment venues, is that workers must stay under a certain gross income to remain on OHP, section 8 housing, EBT and etc. This leaves a gap between minimum wage workers, who can collect OHP and EBT while working close to full-time, and workers at a high enough wage to afford regular health insurance who can forgo OHP. Everyone else in the middle, say, those who make up to \$8 over minimum, therefore will only work a limited amount of hours “on the books,” typically about 20-24 hours, so they won’t lose their OHP and etc. So we have those who feel they can only afford to work part-time, and those who want to work 60+ hours a week. This bill does not address either of those situations. Perhaps legislators should try to solve the worker “donut hole” for OHP. That would be a win for everyone. This overtime bill is pretty much a lose for everyone. I urge you to vote NO on HB4002.

Please feel free to contact me if you would like any further input from me.

Mary Alionis
541-761-5867

Whistling Duck Farm and Store
12800 Williams Hwy.
Grants Pass, OR 97527