

House Committee on Labor and Business

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Greetings Honorable Business and Labor Committee Chair, Vice-Chairs, and Members:

My name is Bradley Weeks and I am a 5th generation Oregon farmer. Weeks Berry Nursery was started in 1888 as a peach farm and received its nursery license in 1908 by George Weeks, then ran by his son Wilber Weeks. My Grandfather Wayne Weeks, one of Oregon State University's first Forest Service graduates, who helped build the Cross of the Holy Mount in the Black Hills, left the service to join his father in the nursery business. My father, John Weeks graduated from OSU and took over for Grandpa Wayne in the 1970's. I started working with Dad in 1996 after serving in the Army during Desert Storm. Weeks Berry Nursery has been a family business for over 115 years.

I employ between 14 to 25 employees. My Operations Manager Annie L. has worked for 4 generations of Weeks'. My sales manager, Sue C. has been working for us for 35 years. My Field Manager, Guadalupe C. has been full time from 2010. Maria T., Guadalupe's wife joined our family and has worked to become our Floor Manager this year.

Our full-time employees receive the following benefit package:

Full health insurance through Providence Health Plan.

Dental insurance through Moda.

40 hours paid time off per year.

40 hour paid sick leave per year.

A yearly 8 hour increase of PTO and sick leave for each year for 5 years. At the end of 5 years total PTO/sick leave totals 160 hours per year.

Our company pays time and a half after 40 hours per week. The reason we do so is that we resell some of our products that are not exempt from the overtime laws in place now. We have found that the time tracking involved is too complicated, therefore, we pay overtime over 40 hours. We make this work for us by limiting the hours worked to 50 hours maximum in the work week. If we need to work more than 50 hours we then outsource from a Labor Contractor to get the job finished. This costs us less in our labor bill. The cost per employee from a Labor Contractor is \$18.00 per hour versus the \$22.50 for overtime plus matching taxes for our seasonal employees. Our starting wage for seasonal employees is \$15.00 per hour.

Oregon has over 750 small family farms. These farms have just figured out how to keep our businesses solvent after 6 years of the Oregon minimum wage increases.

In 2016 my labor pay was \$337,991, \$449,000 with added benefits.  
In 2017 my labor pay was \$399,000, \$483,000 with added benefits.  
In 2018 my labor bill was \$450,000, \$550,000 with added benefits.  
In 2019 my labor bill was \$469,000, \$605,000 with added benefits.  
In 2020 my labor bill was \$525,000, 658,000 with added benefits.  
In 2021 my labor bill was \$572,000, 695,000 with added benefits.

My company grosses between 1.2 to 1.4 million dollars a year with a 2 to 4% increase in income per year, for a 12% increase over the last 6 years. In comparison, our labor bill has increased 54.75% over the last 6 years.

As we have seen in states like California, from which this bill is being modeled after, nurseries will be forced to cut hours and benefits to their existing employees. They may also be forced to choose other uses for their land. For example, Norcal Nursery in Red Bluff, CA. was bought by the large farm corporation based out of Spain, Planasa De Navarra, S.A. Norcal Nursery was a family owned farm. Planasa now owns over 1,500 hectares of worldwide farm land and is growing. That is the size of my home city of Keizer. They are buying up small family farms that can no longer afford to do business because of labor issues.

With 750 small nurseries employing Oregonians, how many families are going to be negatively affected?

Our industry has had to figure out how to navigate these important labor issues and still be competitive. I supply over 1,800 garden centers in the US and 100 in Canada. That is all out of state revenue that we bring into Oregon. I am also having to compete with out of state nurseries that only pay federal minimum wage. At this point, the playing field is not level.

The threat that I see growing faster and faster is the destruction of our way of life. I know every one of my employees. They are my family. Their problems are my problems. We enjoy summer cook outs and Christmas parties. Every year each employee, whether employed by me or from a Labor Contractor, receives a turkey for Thanksgiving and a Ham for Christmas.

My Sales Manager knows all of my customers by name, their children's names, and their pets names. I do not want to see Oregon take the same failed path the other states have taken. I do not want my employees lost to some corporation that is not even in Oregon, let alone not in the US. I do not want a corporation to come in and destroy the land my family has carefully tended to for 115 years with corporate farm practices. I am the only property in the Keizer city limits that is zoned Ag/Light Industrial. I could farm cell towers or storage units, but I do not want that. I do not want to lose all the love, sweat, and devotion of over 115 years from my family. My family of 2,875 people my farm has employed, help to raise children, and feel pride of a day well worked.

This bill as presented is wrong for everyone due to the seasonal nature of our business's. I want what is best for all Oregon Farmers, owners, and employees. I want to come together and sit down with both sides and put together a fair, balanced bill that I can come back to my employees with and say, look, we set up laws that benefit us all. The OAN and the nursery industry is Oregon's big "Co-op Family Farm." All the small farms work together to keep Oregon green, our planet healthy, and our community fed.

In conclusion, please let us sit with you, share our stories and our employee's stories. Oregon sits on the 45th parallel, the best farming land on this planet. I want to protect the land for myself, my 5 children, all their children, my employees that have been with us for multiple generations, and the multiple generations to come. Take this journey to keep our land and farms in the hands of Oregonians. We are an Agricultural State. We feed the world. Tell me of any more noble effort in this world than feeding our families and our community? We are now asking for help from our government family.

My sincere gratitude for the time you have taken to read this,

Bradley Eugene Weeks  
Weeks Berry Nursery Inc  
Phone: 503.881.6065