

Submitter: Lorne Blackman
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Business and Labor
Measure: HB4002

Dear Oregon Legislator

Please consider the plight of the farm community in the Agricultural Overtime bill you are considering.

In our ornamental nursery business, our busy planting season coincides with the even busier harvest/shipping season. As we are generally unable to add sufficient trained workers during this window, we are forced to rely on our permanent staff to work extra hours during that time.

Our people look forward to the extra hours available during that time.

We are heavily labor dependent with labor costs consuming 50% of our gross revenue. We are severely impacted by mandates that increase labor costs. These are some of the reasons that agriculture was originally exempted from OT regulations. The basic nature of the business has not changed.

Over the last 7-8 years, our cost of an entry level employee has been driven up by approximately 85% mostly through combined state and federal mandates. Today we pay our workers a \$15 minimum starting wage. Overtime pay would add an additional huge hurdle on top of that.

To compensate we would be forced to hire additional workers for a 3 month spring season. But it is already nearly impossible to find reliable people at any pay rate who are willing to do this kind of work, let alone quality people available to work a short season.

We have tried to compensate by relying on the H2-A program (which is a great win-win concept) but those costs are being driven even higher by regulatory burdens and irrationally high adverse effect wage calculation mandates.

What can we do? Where will it end?

Mandating overtime leaves us without a workable solution. We are suffering under a severe labor shortage which has been aggravated by government spending policies. We wonder what planet we are living on.

Please give us some breathing room. Let us catch up with the burdens we already face without adding more.

We employ almost 200 people but we wonder about our future. The regulatory and economic uncertainty driven by hyperactive government policies make us want to get out of the business.

I am asking you to please support the Nursery and Greenhouse Industry. Please preserve the overtime exemption for agriculture. We desperately need the ag compromise that allows a window of flexibility to cover our peak harvest and planting needs.

Sincerely,

Lorne and Auralea Blackman
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