

Submitter: Stewart Kircher

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Business and Labor

Measure: HB4002

Chair Holvey and members of the committee, my name is Stewart Kircher and I am an organic dairy farmer from Dayton. We are a family farm that has been in operation since the early 1980's. We employ roughly fifty people year-round, some of which have been working at the dairy for thirty plus years, all the way down to high school students doing work study programs, and college students working part time. We enjoy creating opportunities for anybody wanting to pursue a career in agriculture.

We are committed to treating our employees fairly, caring for our animals, the land, the environment, and creating a place where people enjoy coming to work every day. A sudden change in our labor costs and laws could be detrimental to our employees and our farms.

Dairy farming is a unique industry in that we spend 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and 365 days a year caring for our livestock. This a consistent work load every day, no matter what time of year, what the weather is, or what challenges you may face to get the jobs done. We also grow almost all of our own feed for our animals, creating an added seasonal work load and need for extra seasonal staff to harvest our crops during the short time window we are typically allowed with the Pacific Northwest climate.

We provide the best opportunities and benefits possible for our employees. Including, excellent wages, permanent housing, vehicles, fuel, health insurance, vacation, sick leave, flexibility for family care and so much more. We have done multiple high school apprentice programs, funded higher education programs for employees extended learning, and even paid for full college tuitions.

On several occasions we have had individuals apply for jobs just looking for additional hours to increase their overall monthly income. These individuals had been previously working in other industries which offered overtime pay, but rarely were allowed to work over 40 hours per week. We have also seen employees leave the farm for a different industry paying overtime and return a few months later due to lower total monthly income.

We feel this bill would be harmful to our employees and send them home with less income to care for their families. With the current agriculture climate, employers do not have the means to hire more employees or afford the added overtime costs.

We strongly oppose HB 4002 and would request a livestock exemption. Thank you

for your time and consideration.