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On Behalf Of:

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During the wildfires, while daytime skies were dark in Willamette Valley, farm workers showed up to work. In the heatwaves, farm workers endured hazardous conditions while literally dying from heat exposure. Throughout this pandemic, farm workers show up to ensure we have fresh food while fighting for access to basic protective equipment. I can empathize as someone who comes from a farm working family. But these farm workers need more than just empathy. They need our elected leaders to step up.

This session the legislature will determine if farm workers should be treated fairly, like you and me. By that I mean their ability to qualify for overtime. Some argue that "farm owners will pay too much, or "the harvest will spoil." These points sound good—but let me explain why those arguments have no merit.

As a 25-year-old farm worker, I reported to the field at 6 a.m. everyday to work a 12-hour shift. After my fifth day towing a two-story harvester with people sorting garlic seed, my replacement didn't show. My orders next were to work their shift. I should have declined but I put myself and others in danger because I needed the money, and my employer was willing to exploit that need instead of focus on the safety of the workers. After several more hours, I had to shut down the harvester before my eyelids did. This upset the sorters who had only worked a nine-hour shift. I clocked 69 hours in five days without overtime in hazardous conditions because laws did not protect me or the sorters from the abuse.

Four months later: Same 12-hour shifts, seven days a week. Only this time the harvest was Christmas trees. Gravel lots lined with lamps pointing up into semi-trucks in the same way that some UPS and FedEx lots are setup, only these packages are Noble firs instead of Amazon packages. While UPS, FedEx and Amazon are required to pay overtime which helps their schedule, farm owners are not. This crop doesn't spoil though. It actually gains value as it grows if not harvested. There's also about as much nutritional value in a Christmas tree as there is in an Amazon box but only one worker delivering their product is eligible for fair wages. So farmworkers are taken advantage of, season after season, in hazardous conditions because there's very little protecting them from the abuse that has run rampant.

I support farmworker overtime because we need to move past prejudiced practices of ancient times. Washington State has. California has. So when nurseries complain "it's hard to find workers," explain to them that's probably because they fled to our neighbors in the north and south who pay better. If the argument is "farm owners will

have to automate," I say let them. That means more workers for the thousands of Oregon jobs which are severely understaffed. We talk about paying people what their worth, so why not farm workers. Farm workers are people, too.