

Submitter: Cameron Skeen

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Business and Labor

Measure: HB4002

Dear House Committee members,

I own a farming operation in Ontario that specializes in high value, labor intensive crops. I am strongly opposed to HB 4002.

I employ 6 people during our peak time all of whom have strong farm backgrounds. They have trade skills within the farming industry that have allowed them to be successful in careers they enjoy within agriculture. They have chosen to carve out careers for themselves knowing that there are long hours during critical times of the year and tremendous down time during other times. They are not being held against their will to work in agriculture. Like any of us, we work in a trade or profession we enjoy and love and take pride in. My employees are no different, they take pride in their work and profession and the long hours it entails during the growing season to know they are contributing to the food supply of our state and country and they wear it with a badge of honor that they are part of a select group of people who are willing to put in the time and hard work for a sought after result. They get paid very competitively because of their skill set and work ethic.

Labor continues to be elusive. We are short labor and with the passage of HB 4002 I would be forced to find additional labor with a unique set of skills and knowledge which quite frankly isn't out there in the labor market. I would then become less competitive with my neighbor farmers across the river in Idaho who supply the same businesses I do with commodities. So I would have a choice to make, do I just move on from the state of Oregon because I can't compete? Do I cut my employees hours back in an effort to be competitive so they in turn make less money (hurting them financially) and then watch them leave to another industry leaving me with no labor at all?

In some instances there are opportunities to automate. But who does that benefit? People will lose their jobs, farm operators take on tremendous financial and performance risks investing in automation that may or may not be as good as humans all in an effort to survive. Its a lose-lose proposition in most cases.

There is nothing that I grow that can't be grown in other areas of the country and more specifically across the river from where I operate in Oregon. I'm not going to make the argument that food prices will rise to the consumer (even though at some level they will) because someone else in a different state or country will fill the void I leave should I become uncompetitive and unprofitable. And then what? So the

same people you are trying to protect will have been forced into something or somewhere different. This doesn't benefit the State, my employees, or myself.

People in farming choose farming because its what they want to do. They understand what it entails. They understand that the farm never sleeps during the growing season. We don't tell mother nature what to do, we are subjects to what the weather dictates and have to act in a timely manner accordingly. Oregon has a great agricultural heritage, HB 4002 will chip away at that heritage far more than support it.

Best regards,  
Cameron Skeen