

23 February 2022

To: Joint Committee on Farmworker Overtime

From: Jo Erikson, Avoca Seed

Re: Support for Farmworker Overtime

Co-chairs Taylor and Holvey, and Members of the Joint Committee on Farmworker Overtime,

My name is Jo Erikson, and I live and farm in Corvallis, Oregon.

I am writing to you as a farmer and farm owner/operator who strongly supports farmworker overtime. Farmworkers absolutely should receive overtime pay after 40 hours in a work week at one and one-half times the employee's regular rate of pay.

Farmworkers have been excluded from minimum wage protections, child labor laws, and overtime pay since the FLSA of 1938. It was wrong for agriculture to be excluded then, and it remains egregious today, nearly 100 years later. Seasonality, deadlines, and production are not unique to agriculture. Other industries with fluctuating production needs are required to manage employee time, schedules, and wages according to labor laws. There is no justifiable reason for these exploitative labor practices to continue. My partner and I operate a small organic seed farm, Avoca Seed, located just outside of Corvallis, Oregon. We manage from 2-5 employees each year on 7 acres and have a successful, thriving business. We pay well above minimum wage and have an overtime policy of time and a half if anyone works more than 40 hours a week. I say this simply to point out that it is in fact very doable. Treating workers time with dignity and paying them fairly shouldn't be a personal business choice. It should be the law.

I acknowledge that a lot of farm businesses will say that they can't afford the increased labor costs and I believe them. This industry has been built on the backs of exploited labor from day one. Every policy written, every market price negotiation, every established law and guidance, and every standard operating procedure has been built on this foundation of exploitative labor. Addressing the labor inequities in agriculture now is just one step towards righting these fundamental wrongs. There will naturally be more work to do and that shouldn't deter the legislature from taking this step now. Farmworkers have been treated like second-class workers for far too long and deserve the same rights as other workers. We deserve dignity, respect and labor rights. We deserve our full humanity.

I urge you to pass farmworker overtime in the 2022 Legislative Session to ensure farmworkers in Oregon are paid fairly for their skilled and essential labor.

Sincerely,

Jo Erikson

Farmer and Co-owner/operator
Avoca Seed, Corvallis, Oregon