

Submitter: Walter E Lierman
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Farm Worker Overtime
Measure: HB4002

I wanted to express my opposition to the Ag Overtime Bill. I raise blueberries and hazelnuts in Marion county and do not have any fully time employees. I heavily utilize contract farm labor for harvest and pruning. While the overtime requirement would not impact the pruning activities, it would have a huge impact on the harvesting of the fruit. Since we utilize a farm labor contractor, the workers go from farm to farm throughout the summer, typically working 6-7 days a week for 8-10 hours a day. Our contractor brings workers that live in California during this time period to help fill the labor need during this timeframe. The workers coming from out of state come here because of the number of hours that they can work, and they make significant money while here. These workers typically come in late June and start heading home in late July or early August.

It should also be noted that the price that we receive for our fruit is market driven. We typically get a higher price during the first week of harvest, when the market is starved for fruit, and then the price tends to fall throughout July and early August, before it begins to recover. By mid to late July we are normally having to weigh the cost of continuing to use hand labor against the market price of our fruit. If we were required to pay overtime wages, that decision would come even earlier in the season.

The overtime bill would require our Farm Labor Contractor to limit the available hours for the workers, which in turn would reduce their pay. This will also de-incentivize out of state workers coming to Oregon, reducing the already tight labor availability during our harvest times.

Although providing overtime to agricultural workers seems reasonable on the surface, requiring overtime pay will actually hurt workers by reducing their pay and will hurt producers by limiting the ability to harvest fruit at an economically feasible price point, which will reduce the potential income for producers of fresh fruit.