

Submitter: Joe Ruef
On Behalf Of: Oppose HB 4002
Committee: Joint Committee On Farm Worker Overtime
Measure: HB4002

I am a livestock producer and have employees, many of whom work year-round on my operation. I want to share with you my concerns about the impact of an ag overtime mandate on my operation and employees.

Livestock operations have unique needs. Cows, sheep and other livestock rely on 24-hour supervision and response and require a flexible workforce year-round. Implementing HB 4002, an overtime mandate at 40 hours, will be difficult if not impossible for livestock producers. How will I care for my animals if an emergency comes up? The market doesn't give me the ability to demand a higher price for beef or milk simply because Oregon increases labor costs. Costs for feed, fuel and supplies are skyrocketing. Labor costs come straight from the bottom line at a time when many farms and ranches are struggling to stay afloat. An inflexible 40-hour overtime mandate simply won't work for our industry. While we appreciate the range exemption contained in HB 4002A, no livestock operation solely has animals on the range, and work in barns and stockyards is often required. Tracking time would create a logistical headache for my operation.

At a 40-hour overtime threshold, workers risk losing shifts, total hours and take-home pay. In addition, the new labor costs might cause trade-offs for current benefits like insurance and housing. With increasing labor costs, many producers simply may not be able to continue providing these additional benefits to their workers. Agricultural overtime could have dire consequences for the families who depend on ranches and dairies for their income.

A tax credit is not a workable or durable solution to farmers paying for overtime. Tax credits will be phased out as soon as a recession hits, cannot be enacted in perpetuity, and, as crafted, phase down when growers will need them most. We need a workable and durable solution that can only be found by adjusting the structure of the overtime proposal to account for the seasonal and year-round needs of the agriculture industry.

Please oppose a 40-hour overtime mandate for Oregon agriculture under HB 4002. It won't work for livestock producers. Our needs aren't seasonal, and imposing new costs at this difficult time will sacrifice our local, family-owned dairies, livestock operations, and range operations. We would rather take our chances with BOLI than face the certain reduction in hours and family-scale livestock operations that this bill guarantees.

