

Coleman Agriculture Inc.

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Subject: Opposition to House Bill 2548

Dear House Committee on Labor & Workforce Standards Opposing House Bill 2548,

Hello, my name is Jennifer Coleman. I am the member of the seventh-generation farming family in the Willamette Valley. Our operation spans from St. Paul to Independence and from Mt Angel to Grand Island. As well as sizeable farm in Culver Oregon. Our farm produces Hops, Hazelnuts, Garlic Seed, Seed Crops, and Vegetable Row Crop. We have both a year-round and a seasonal workforce. We can go from around 75 employees in the winter/slow season to 300 during harvest season. Our workforce is made up of domestics, H2A guest workers, college and high school inters.

I am writing to express my strong opposition to House Bill 2548, which is currently under consideration. As a concerned Ag employer in Oregon, I believe that this bill will have significant negative consequences for our farm and other family farms across the state.

House Bill 2548 presents several concerns, including the ability of an unelected governing body with the authority to set increased regulations for Oregon Farms. This would include setting wages and piece rate, determining work schedules, training on workers' rights by certified worker organizations/unions. This board would establish health and safety requirements in addition to those already adopted by OR-OSHA. This bill also would eliminate at-will employment for farms and ranches.

Oregon already has some of the highest labor costs in the country. Farm workers are currently protected by very strong workplace regulations such as paid sick time, minimum wage, a relatively high Adverse Effect Wage Rate and overtime rules. We as farmers are not typically price setters in our industry. Farms are price takers. This bill will increase labor cost across our farming operation There is no way to recover the increased cost in our current employment plan. This bill will force layoffs and possible farm closures.

Oregon OSHA has one of the highest worksite inspection rates and has adopted some of the most expansive workplace protections and housing regulations in the country. As a farmer we have embraced the increase safety regulation because we recognize the importance of our work family. We can't do the job alone. Our employees are instrumental in every operation on the farm. If enacted, this legislation will ultimately have an adverse effect on our farm employees. Currently on our farm we are already reducing worker hours, changing our crops, automating where we can, all to control labor costs.

I am strongly opposed to the proposal in HB 2548 the eliminates at-will employment for farm and ranches. HB 2548 carves out farms and puts us at risk for costly claims for making necessary staffing decisions. Agricultural employment needs are already impacted by weather, yield, market conditions, pests and disease. This is unfair to single out agriculture and void them of the same privileges that other private sectors in Oregon have.

House Bill 2548 gives unelected bureaucrats the power to set wages, regulations, and safety rules that go far beyond current protections. With the consequence of adding more regulatory and cost burden to farms. There is no accountability for the decisions they make, even if their decisions ultimately close farms or results in layoffs. This board undermines the governing bodies of OR-OSHA, BOLI, and DOL. Departments that currently have authority in Ag businesses.

This bill doesn't help workers, consumers or farmers. It just makes farming harder and more expensive. I urge you to vote no on HB 2548 to protect Oregon Farms and Ranches and the jobs we currently provide. It is crucial to consider the long-term ramifications and listen to the voices of those who will be directly impacted.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. I hope you will stand with your constituents and oppose House Bill 2548. Please feel free to contact me if you would like to discuss this issue further.

Sincerely,
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