

Submitter: Nicole Brown

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Labor and Workplace Standards

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2548

My name is Nicole Brown, and I provide bookkeeping services to local farms. I am asking you to please oppose HB 2548. Every payroll period, I see firsthand the increased costs of overtime, hours being reduced for employees, the increased burden of paperwork for regulations and as a result, more mechanization of farm work for farmers that can afford to purchase equipment. There isn't a lot of wiggle room in most budgets for all these increases. I do not see how farm workers would benefit from these proposals, and I see more farms disappearing if this bill passes.

I also see a decrease in opportunities for our youth should this bill be passed. My children have worked seasonally on the farms of family friends in Mount Angel, tying them to agriculture, and encouraging them to enter careers that support agriculture in Oregon. HB 2548 would likely eliminate these opportunities because an increased minimum wage for ag workers would not encourage farmers to hire unskilled high school kids.

Please oppose HB 2548. This is a very negative bill for farm employers. This bill has the potential to cripple family farms due to prohibitive costs associated with labor costs and increased exposure to litigation. If farmers cannot afford labor and regulations, we will have to turn to strictly mechanized farming, which will change our beautifully diverse state into mono-crop farms owned exclusively by large corporations. Our family farms will disappear, and so will the variety of specialty crops that Oregon agriculture is known for.

Farmers generally don't get to set prices for their commodities, so there is no way to recover the increased cost passed by the new governing Board. Farm workers are currently protected by very strong workplace regulations such as paid sick time and minimum wage. Oregon OSHA has one of the highest worksite inspection rates and has adopted some of the most expansive workplace protections in the country. What real issue is this bill trying to solve?

HB 2548 gives unelected bureaucrats the power to set wages and safety rules that go far beyond current protections, 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 result in layoffs.

I am strongly opposed to the proposal in HB 2548 that eliminates at-will employment for farms and ranches. HB 2548 carves out farms and puts us at risk for costly claims for making necessary staffing decisions. All other private sectors in Oregon

enjoy at-will status, but farms—whose employment needs are impacted by weather, yields, trade and market conditions, pests and diseases—would not. This is unfair. This bill doesn't help workers or consumers; it just makes farming harder and more expensive. I have already seen farms reduce worker hours, change crops, or automate to control labor costs associated with overtime; HB 2548 would have more severe consequences.

I urge you to vote no on HB 2548 to protect Oregon farms and ranches and the jobs we currently provide.

Sincerely,

Nicole Brown