

My name is Helen Dusschee, and I grow winegrapes in the Willamette Valley near Dallas and Monmouth. My husband and I established Freedom Hill Vineyard in 1981 and have been pioneers in the Oregon wine industry. We have a 92 acre vineyard and sell our fruit to many premier wineries in Oregon.

I strongly oppose HB 2548. Given our history of laborious recordkeeping and awareness of labor costs over the last 40 years this is clearly a very negative bill for farm employers; creating costs that may prohibit and challenge growing grapes with farm labor.

In the current wine market our prices for grapes are decreasing. There is absolutely no way to recover the increased costs this bill would pass on to the grower. Our industry has relied on hand labor and it is clear these increased costs would make us more determined to replace much of the labor with mechanical means.

Our farm works very hard to pay a decent wage to all employees, follow OSHA guidelines, and offer paid sick time as appropriate to state guidelines. I do not understand how an unelected board who have no sense of the business believe they can regulate beyond the current protections for workers.

This bill makes farming harder and more expensive and adds added risk to the Oregon wine market's success. Using hand labor allows Oregon's vineyards to grow premium wine grapes. It will be very difficult for mechanization to contribute in the same way to our world class wines.

I am strongly opposed to the proposal in House bill 2548 that eliminates at-will employment for farms. This bill carves out the agricultural industry 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 and our vineyard whose employment needs are impacted by weather, yields, pests and diseases and market conditions would not. How unfair is this? Seemingly so.

We have altered and decreased our work hours to deal with the high costs of overtime. Now one more very severe and costly bill with multiple regulations is being proposed.

It scares me that all we have worked for over the last 40 plus years may be threatened for our farm family legacy. I thought Oregon was a great state in 1981 to start our business. Now I feel punished for doing something good with the land and for our state.

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