

Submitter: Tristan Gingerich
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Labor and Workplace Standards
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2548

I am writing to urge you to vote no on HB 2548.

I am a fifth generation family farmer. My family has been involved with growing and packing blueberries, growing and washing/drying hazelnuts, and growing seed crops. The industries we farm for are not only national but also global. We have no control over our product's pricing at the retail level and are forced to compete with global supplies. When competing against British Columbia for blueberries and Turkey for hazelnuts, the exchange rate combines with lower international production costs and cause our products to be undercut by pricing every time.

Every time additional expense is added to farming, there is no way for small growers like me to recover the increased costs. We have seen many growers sell their operations in recent years, especially in the blueberry industry. They have been unable to get pricing that supports rising cost of inputs and labor. Oregon has very high labor costs compared to much of the rest of the United States. I spoke with a pack shed manager in the summer of 2024 who runs sheds in California in the spring and Oregon in the summer. He told me he is paying more for labor outside McMinnville than he is south of Fresno. He may have been exaggerating, but his point was that labor is very expensive in Oregon and blueberry pricing doesn't support. California blueberries enjoy higher retail pricing than Oregon blueberries, making labor costs harder to support.

Farm workers are already protected by very strong workplace regulations. Oregon OSHA has one of the highest worksite inspection rates and has adopted some of the most expansive workplace protections and fines in the country. HB 2548 gives unelected bureaucrats the power to set wages and safety rules that go far beyond what our industries can support. Parts of the legislation and lobbyists keep telling farmings they need to do more, but they don't have answers to how we are supposed to shoulder these burdens. Additionally, what accountability will the Board have for their decisions that force farms to layoff workers or sell their operations? We are far past the point of business owner accountability or employee safety and living wages.

I am strongly opposed to the proposal in HB 2548 that eliminates at-will employment for farmers. At-will employment is the standard in most states. One of the few ways that farmers can adjust their expenses is by downsizing their workforce during lean times, but HB 2548 will make even that harder and open farming operations more prone to lawsuits. Meanwhile, all other sectors in Oregon would be at-will. Not only

is that unfair, but it will likely result in job loss as employers plan workforce needs to address that risk.

Farming is important in Oregon and it is not easy. I don't expect law makers who aren't involved in farming to understand the stress, debt and uncertainty of farming. No one is a farmer to get rich, they are farmers because they have a passion for it. What I do expect from law makers is to not run my farm from afar by making employment decisions that are so far beyond national standards that we can't possibly be competitive in national and international markets.

This bill ultimately won't help workers because there is no margin for more labor expense. Annual minimum wage increases and mandatory overtime has stripped away longer work weeks. Reports are coming out of California and Washington about how farm workers are making less and have to decide if they want to get a second job due to overtime getting cut to compensate for higher labor costs.

This bill won't help consumers because they will be forced into choosing whether they pay more for local crops or pay less for crops that were brought from other states and countries. Long distance transport increases the carbon footprint of our food. Consumers are hurting due to inflation and HB 2548 is a great example of legislation that drives grocery inflation.

VOTE NO!