

Submitter: Tom Coleman
On Behalf Of: Coleman Agriculture
Committee: House Committee On Labor and Workplace Standards
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2548

Members of the Committee,

My name is Tom Coleman, and I am a fourth generation farmer from Saint Paul, Oregon.

I'm asking you to oppose HB 2548 because it threatens my ability to keep farming. Oregon already has some of the highest labor costs in the country, and after several tough years, I can't afford more regulations and wage increases.

This bill would give unelected bureaucrats the power to set wages and safety rules that go far beyond current protections, adding more regulatory burden to farms like mine. Farmers know how devastating this regulatory model is. Oregon's state agencies have adopted very harmful regulations in the last five years with little to no accountability for their actions. This board would be no different; its members aren't even elected.

HB 2548 unfairly targets agriculture by taking away at-will employment, meaning I wouldn't be able to make necessary staffing decisions without the risk of costly lawsuits. One claim can cost tens of thousands of dollars or more. I also don't believe that farms should be forced to keep employees who may not meet performance expectations or adapt to the demands of the job. All other sectors in Oregon would be at-will, but farms—whose employment needs are impacted by weather, yields, trade, pests, diseases, etc.—would not. Not only is that unfair, but it will likely result in job loss, not job security.

This bill doesn't help workers or consumers; it just makes farming harder and more expensive. I have already had to manage hours to comply with agricultural overtime, to the disappointment of our many long-term employees, and HB 2548 could force me to make tough operational choices like reducing my workforce, changing crops, automating, or selling the operation.

I urge you to vote no to protect our farms and jobs. The regulations being imposed by the government here in Oregon are creating a situation where family farms like ours are being forced to sell to large corporations/private equity because we do not have the resources to keep up with the red tape. Oregon Ag. will soon be made up of small operations who can not feed the World and large operations that put profit before everything else.

Thank you for your time,
Tom Coleman