

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

My name is Alex Duerst. I am a third-generation farmer from the Silverton area. We raise grass seed, grains, brassicas, and hazelnuts. I am in strong opposition to this bill.

We value our employees, and we have a good respectful relationship with them all. I believe they appreciate how we treat them. Many of them have been with us for over 20 years and we have very low turn-over rate in workers. I believe this bill will just be another encumbrance for Oregon farmers, and not really live up to the expectations of what the bill sponsors think it would do. Oregon grass seed producers have lost our competitive edge in the marketplace. This is partially due to legislative activities that have placed more regulations and expenses on the farm owner (ag overtime, CAT tax, etc.). Grass seed growers are price takers, we are not able to pass our increased costs onto the consumer. All of ag is seeing a serious downturn in revenue post COVID. More regulations will cause some family farms to go out of business.

This bill seems to overstep the regulations currently in place through Oregon OSHA and BOLI. Over the past few years, we have seen OSHA come with new regulations for protection of agriculture workers such as heat, smoke and Worker Protection Standard trainings. Our company has implemented plans for all of these, and we train our workers annually. Creating this unelected governing body to set increased regulations seems unnecessary when Oregon has some of the strictest OSHA regulations and protections for workers already.

Ag work is not for everyone. Some jobs are difficult, but no one is forced to work in ag. If we have an employee who is not physically able to do a certain task, we find one that they are able to do. When the weather conditions are too hot or cold, we either shut down early or find an inside job for our employees to do. To those employees who are not happy in their jobs, I would advise them to seek new employment, rather than advocating or expecting legislative action to make their work conditions fit their personal expectations. This bill will hurt the employers who are acting in good faith to their valued employees. The employers who are not abiding by the worker protections currently in place, will likely not abide by new standards either. Please do not enact a blanket legislation that places more burden on employers acting in good faith.

I urge you to vote no on HB 2548 to protect Oregon family farms and to help us

maintain our good working relationship with our employees.

Thank you,

Alex Duerst