



Northwest Agricultural Cooperative Council

TESTIMONY

March 12, 2025

Oppose HB 2548

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition of HB 2548 which would hurt family farms by removing policymaking from elected officials to an unelected and unaccountable board, and treat private agriculture employers differently than other private employers by eliminating at-will employment in agriculture.

Northwest Agricultural Cooperative Council (NWACC) is the professional organization of farmer-owned businesses operating in Washington and Oregon. NWACC advocates on behalf of agricultural cooperatives. Because of the negative impact this bill will have on farmers and our cooperatives, NWACC strongly opposes HB 2548 because it will hurt family farms.

HB 2548 puts Oregon's farm and ranch families in an untenable position.

- **Shift in Burden of Proof:** HB 2548 would require employers to prove the reasonableness of a termination, shifting the burden to them. Family farms and ranches would be vulnerable to costly litigation, as they would need to defend against employment claims, even in situations involving market conditions, poor yields, or weather events.
- **Increased Litigation Costs:** Family farms already face enormous financial strain. It costs around \$75,000 just to settle a claim before it reaches court. Adding legal risks will only increase financial pressure, especially for small, family-run operations.
- **Economic Hardships:** Many Oregon farms are already struggling with poor yields and low commodity prices. Most will spend the next several years recovering from cash losses incurred in 2023 and 2024. HB 2548 adds another layer of uncertainty that could force family farms into financial ruin.
- **Impediments to Staffing Flexibility:** HB 2548 limits necessary flexibility for staffing and termination decisions, making it harder for employers to navigate the unpredictability of farming. These restrictions could lead to difficulty in hiring and maintaining a workforce.

Moreover, this bill proposes to move important policymaking as it relates to labor standards from elected officials (eg. the legislature) and give them to an unelected board that has no accountability. This is the wrong approach to policymaking that can cause economic harm to Oregon and our communities.

And lastly, many family farms and ranches are struggling with higher costs of production, including increasing wage rates, and difficult market conditions. Ag cooperatives rely on these family farms. Without farmers, our businesses cannot survive, and our employees will be out of work.

Please keep our farmers and employees in mind and vote “NO” on HB 2548.