



OREGON HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Chair Grayber, Vice Chairs Muñoz and Elmer, and members of the House Committee on Labor and Workplace Standards,

My name is Representative Zach Hudson and I represent Oregon's 49th House District, which encompasses Troutdale, Fairview, Wood Village, and parts of Gresham, and East Portland. I am writing to urge you to pass HB 2548, which would establish a labor standards board for agricultural workers.

Agricultural workers feed Oregon and the world with the fruits of their labor. There's no denying that farm work is hard work, and too many workers face unsafe, undignified, and unfair conditions, on and off the job. As farms consolidate into larger and larger companies, the power relationship between farmworkers and their employers grows even more unequal.

This inequity is further worsened by the exclusion of farmworkers from the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), which grants workers the right to unionize and engage in collective bargaining. This exclusion is as discriminatory today as it was in 1935, when the NLRA was passed. It disproportionately affects Latino and immigrant farmworkers, who make up a significant portion of Oregon's agricultural workforce.

While farmworkers have the right to organize in Oregon, there are no processes in our state for them to negotiate terms of employment such as wages, hours, benefits, leave, and safety and health. As a result, Oregon farmworkers have consistently experienced economic instability, unsafe working conditions, and wrongful termination at high rates.

As farmworkers continue to work in grueling conditions, Oregon's agricultural sector has seen significant growth in sales in recent years. According to USDA Census of Agriculture data, the total market value of agricultural products sold in Oregon rose from about \$5 billion in 2017 to nearly \$6.8 billion in 2022. That's almost a 36% increase in nominal dollars, and farmworkers have seen nowhere near a commensurate raise to their wages or accommodations.

Establishing a Farmworker Standards Board will help workers and employers collaboratively establish fair wages, safe working conditions, and necessary training protocols. The board's model sets up a balanced forum that respects the voices of both

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employers and employees, allowing all stakeholders to contribute to the rulemaking process. This approach not only enhances compliance and effectiveness, but also promotes standards that are practical, equitable, and tailored to the unique needs of Oregon's agricultural sector.

Oregon needs to be proactive as it addresses the changing nature and needs of its agricultural sector and workforce. HB 2548 and its -2 amendment offer a solution that protects the sustainability of our farms and the labor force that supports them. I look forward to a fairer future for our 72,000 farmworkers and the industry they support.

Sincerely,

Representative Zach Hudson