

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

My name is Brenda Frketich and I'm a farmer from St. Paul.
I'm asking you to oppose House Bill 2548.

The ag industry here in Oregon has been hit so many times it is hard to count. From sick leave, ag overtime, mandatory health care, you name it we have footed additional costs with no regard to the simple fact that farmers are price takers. We don't set our prices to increase with the ever-rising costs mandated by our government. Instead we try to absorb and still be competitive in a world market.

And maybe your concern doesn't lie with keeping farmers farming in Oregon. You can get produce from around the world, but continuing food security concerns, tariff wars, the world stage in general throughout history paints a picture that we know is true. Being able to produce your own food and fiber is very important and increasingly so. Not to mention that farming in Oregon produces thousands of jobs, millions of dollars for our economy. And yet the attacks keep coming.

To speak more directly to this bill it is redundant in the most basic sense. We have so many safety parameters in place. Boli and OR-OSHA just to name two agencies that already do much of this work. OR OSHA in fact makes us one of the few state who hold farmers to a higher standard than any federal guidelines. Not to mention they have recently moved their penalty dollar amount up with an 6 fold increase moving state OSHA enforcement dollars from \$1.9 million in fines to \$9.9 million. This workforce standards board would what...just create another level of safety protocols that we need to adhere by that is even more beyond the financial and operational regulations we have now?

I'm concerned about who would serve on this redundant board. There would be no guarantee that someone who is an employer in agriculture would even have a voice. There are so many issues in agriculture that make sometimes simple solutions not workable, how would the voice of the farmer be not be drowned out and actually heard in this unelected board?

I'm also concerned about the removal of at-will employment. Every year our farm hires and releases employees. I can't imagine the cost to our farm if we couldn't release employees after the harvest is over for fear of retaliation in the form of a lawsuit. As a farm the has tried to actually stay lower labor there are times when we need a crew to come in and work to get something done fast because of a change in

the weather, or when more hands are just required due to lack of mechanization. So then do I have to continue to keep those 10-18 employees on if they don't want to leave even though I have no work for them, or I let them go and risk a lawsuit, which even if I win in the end would cost me thousands to fight?

Some legislators in Oregon seems to think that farms are a place where employees treat their workers horribly. And I'm here to tell you that we take great care of the people who work for us. We are fair, we are safe, we care. Because if we didn't do those three things, right now there are farms down the road who do and would be willing to take these hard-working folks on. This bill is redundant, it's too aggressive, and it will be devastating to farmers here in Oregon.

Organizations have worked for a long time to get farm workers in Oregon to unionize. Their efforts have been unsuccessful because at the end of the day by an large farmers in Oregon are treating their employees well meanwhile legislators are continuing to create regulations that take money right out of the pockets of our farmworkers. Hours are down, mechanization is up and that creates a movement that does nothing but harm our hard workers and their families.

Please for farm families and the workers they employ vote no on HB 2548.