



Oregon Sweet Cherry Commission  
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Esteemed Members of the House Sub-Committee On Labor and Workplace Standards,

We the members of the Oregon Sweet Cherry Commission represent a diverse collection of the growers and packers of cherries that are grown in the state of Oregon. We represent an industry made up of countless farmworkers, members of multi-generational family farms, underserved minority farmers, military veteran farmers, and first-generation immigrant farmers. We produce cherries and provide employment to thousands of workers across the state. Many rural communities depend on the economic activity that our industry creates. As a commodity commission under the jurisdiction of the Oregon Department of Agriculture our stated mission is the following, "*The mission of the Oregon Sweet Cherry Commission is to enhance the image of the sweet cherry industry and to increase opportunities for profitability through promotion, education, research, tracking, and commenting on legislation and regulations in accordance with the laws and regulations governing the commission*". As part of our mission we as a commission feel that it is necessary to express this commission's strong opposition to HB 2548 that is currently under consideration by the Oregon State Legislature. This bill would create an unelected Ag Standards Board, that would have the power to impose rules and regulations on Oregon agriculture.

Over 98% of all sweet cherries that are grown in the state of Oregon are hand harvested by migrant and seasonal farm workers. This harvest season that annually spans the months of June, July, and August requires an influx of over 22,000 migrant and seasonal farm workers that either come from other states, other countries, or other parts of Oregon. These workers return year after year, because they recognize the good earnings and accommodations that they receive while working in the Oregon cherry industry. Cherries, like many other tree fruits, are delicate and require human hands to harvest them. There are no practical automation options for harvest. In addition the majority of year round farming tasks are done by farm workers, again with extremely limited automation options. This has fostered an industry that values its skilled workforce, and goes to extreme lengths to provide dignified employment based on mutual respect and dignity. Due to labor shortages, the cherry industry has an excellent understanding of what is required to attract and retain these skilled workers. The cherry industry in Oregon has invested heavily in their workforce in terms of wages, housing, and professional development. This investment has created a social compromise of shared interests. Farms invest in their employees, and employees are invested in the success of the farms they work for. It is the opinion of this commission that HB 2548 would disrupt and undermine the relationship between employer and employees in the cherry industry.

Family farms are passing through historically difficult economic times. Farming operations are unable to set the prices for the crops they grow and rely on market conditions to set the prices. The cherry industry is reeling from climate change related natural disasters that increasingly affect the sustainability of our industry. The heat dome of 2021 and the cherry market collapse of 2023 are two recent examples. Borrowing costs are at generationally high levels that make normal operations challenging. Through this all, the cherry industry strives to take care of our valued workforce. HB 2548 threatens the sustainability of our industry by disenfranchising cherry farms of their right to make their own decisions on how to best manage their relationships with their valued employees.

It is the opinion of this commission that HB 2548 creates an unelected governing body to dictate how the tree fruit industry operates. Our commission has witnessed first hand the chaos, and our industry is still living with the consequences that a similar unelected body at the federal level has caused to USDA researchers and programs that we as an industry depend on. HB 2548 will cause similar disruptions by bringing in non-subject matter experts to dictate how agriculture is run in the state of Oregon. This undermines Oregon state agencies that are partners to the cherry industry. As an industry in Oregon, agriculture currently operates under rules established by the Bureau of Labor and Industry, the Oregon Department of Consumer and Business Services(Oregon OSHA), the Oregon Department of Agriculture, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, and the State of Oregon Employment Department to name a few. The regulatory burden is arduous and adding another layer would not help farm sustainability or farmworkers.

In lieu of creating a new unelected governing body, our commission strongly recommends utilizing the current established state agencies that were listed above to enforce applicable laws. Our commission has not seen any data from any agencies of the State of Oregon that would indicate the need for an Ag Oversight Board. Bad actors should not be allowed to have workers in unsafe conditions and do a disservice to the majority of agricultural operators who work hard to meet national and state standards for the well being of our incredibly important and valued farm workers. Members of our industry who are following the law, should not be penalized for the actions of those who operate outside of the law.

In closing, our commission has appreciated the mutually respectful, productive and cooperative relationship that our growers have with the state of Oregon. We also appreciate the support that our industry has received from the Oregon Department of Agriculture, the Oregon State Legislature and the office of Governor Kotek as our industry has dealt with natural and market disasters. The Oregon Sweet Cherry Commission believes that HB 2548 unfairly targets the agricultural industry and has no precedence in other states or industries. We humbly request that the position of our commission be taken into account when this legislation is discussed.

With respect and gratitude,  
The Oregon Sweet Cherry Commission  
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