

Submitter: Leland Lage
On Behalf Of: Lage Orchards Inc
Committee: House Committee On Labor and Workplace Standards
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2548

HB 2548 is an extreme overreach for agriculture employers and employees. Oregon State already has a standard minimum wage and requirements for breaks plus lunch that we have to follow along with the number of work hours. In addition to this minimum wage we are in constant competition for workers as there are labor shortages. This bill would limit additional benefits that are provided to the workers, as we will no longer be able to afford those costs. Some orchardists such as us, provide housing, electricity, garbage, house water and irrigation at no additional cost to the employee. Our full-time employees are in houses ranging from singlewide to 2 story houses. We cover all the costs for repairs and appliance replacement. Our temporary harvest workers stay in our cabins with all utilities paid for. We are regulated by OSHA and have at times requested them to come out and make sure we are in compliance, if we have questions. Oregon already has minimum wage, hour and break standards. We strive to provide a good work environment and competitive wages, If you standardize wages, it could cripple the company and punish the work force. Farming is not a 40 hour a week business. Fruit crops are perishable, we want the consumer to be able to afford a pear, apple or cherries. With increased costs of harvesting and being unable to control sales costs, how much longer can the agriculture company's stay in business. With increased wages, comes increased costs to everything around to compensate. Piece rate is dependent on many different types of crops, sizes, crop load, and more. There are just too many variables to make piece rate a one size fits all. For instance, not all workers have the same work ethic or experience. Someone starting out might struggle to pick 3-4 bins a day, an experienced picker might pick 7-8 bins a day. Oregon OSHA already has many rules for workplace health and safety issues, we strive to make sure our relationship with our employees is a successful one. Most of our employees have been here for decades, quite a few have retired after 35+ years and the majority of our seasonal workers come back every year.

Not all farms are the same. Not all fruit farms are the same, some fruit is on a tree and ladders are needed. Some tree fruit and nuts can be harvested by machine, some must be picked by hand. Other fruit grows on bushes and can be picked by machines. Some fruit is grown as ground fruit and also needs to be picked by hand. There are dairy farms and cattle farms. All these farms have different needs, different methods of growing & harvesting, different costs and different amount of workers needed. There is no such thing as "STANDARD" when you refer to "FARMING". This bill would do more harm than good.