

Submitter: Theresa Koehnke  
On Behalf Of: Iowa Hill Farms  
Committee: House Committee On Rules  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2548

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May 29, 2025

Chair Bowman, Vice Chairs Drazan and Pham, Members of the Committee,  
I Theresa Koehnke a writing to express our opposition to the -7 amendment to HB 2548.

We are a family farm business who has farmed in the Cornelius Oregon area since 1988 when we planted our first 5 acres of blueberries. We currently farm 34 acres of 3 different varieties of blueberries that are harvested by machine and packed for the freezer market. When we first got started in the business, we relied on family members, friends and local teens to harvest our fruit for local fresh market stands. As time went on, we planted more acreage and due to more production, our need for more labor expanded to include hiring local contracted harvest crews. We were subject to labor laws all along just like any business with some exceptions for agriculture. We were not required to pay overtime. In Oregon, we are now subject to laws regarding overtime currently for the 2025 season we will be responsible for paying overtime any hours over 48 hour per week. This will directly affect our net profit as the cost of labor increases. The production of blueberries in Oregon has increased in the last 20 years as well as the production in other countries like Peru and Chile. All of this has had an impact on the market price we are paid. We have absolutely no control over what we are paid. We cannot pass on the cost of our increased costs to our product sales because the buyer determines what we are paid.

This proposed committee will be paid with taxpayers' money and does not include any members including actual farmers, buyers', packers, or OSU students and faculty who are working with the farming community throughout Oregon Spend that money at Oregon State University and do this important study at an establish agricultural university. I firmly oppose this HB 2548

Our family farm has significant concerns about the -7 amendment and the base bill.

The -7 amendment proposes to spend taxpayer dollars on a study to be conducted

by Portland State University that would focus on labor standards and working conditions of farmworkers.

We are concerned that the bill excludes a number of important partners in development of a study that are intimately connected to agriculture. Oregon State University, our state's land grant university which has strong connections to and knowledge of all facets of our agricultural sectors, including crop diversity of the industry is excluded. OSU extension reaches all corners of the state with its extension program supported by the state of Oregon - that reach, and the relationships are not reflected in the proposal. Additionally, the Oregon Department of Agriculture, who producers, like us work with on a regular basis is not consulted in this study.

As a producer, my farm has to navigate the complex and robust workforce protections and employment practices that our Legislature, agencies, and federal partners put in place, and are concerned that this study focuses on qualitative data rather than cause and effect data - or the impact of what a workforce standard board would do to Oregon's agricultural industries and the adverse impacts it will have for workers.

It is clear the proponents intend to use this biased study to tee up the policy for the 2027 Legislative Session with a pre-determined outcome already baked.

Producers are price takers, and unlike other industries, costs cannot simply be passed on. Farmers are working on thin-to-sometimes-negative margins, and this type of pre-determined policy outcome will cause crushing regulatory, financial, and liability implications that threaten the viability of the seed industry as a whole.

For some, this policy will push them to the edge – diminishing vital resources in our rural communities. Over the last five years, there has been a six percent loss of farmland in Oregon - and 65 percent of farms operating in Or