

I'm writing to encourage you to oppose the proposed minimum wage increase. I am an Oregon Blueberry grower and a school board member for the Silver Falls SD.

An increase in the minimum wage will have several unintended consequences, which will hurt some of the very people that the supporters are hoping to help. It's also important to realize that the minimum wage is for entry level positions, for people without skills that are entering the workforce.

As an Oregon Blueberry Grower, my fresh fruit competes on the market with berries from Michigan, New Jersey and from British Columbia, Canada. If our fruit picking costs increase, we cannot pass those costs along because the berries in Oregon do not control the market price. If our picking costs become out of line with other areas, it will no longer be feasible to supply hand-picked berries for the fresh fruit market. Our other option will be to machine harvest our fruit. Machine harvested fruit tends to have a shorter shelf life so it typically goes to the "process" market at a lower price. The impact of moving to the process fruit market for the worker has a large impact. Instead of using approximately 10,000 man hours to pick one variety of our fruit, we will use approximately 360 man hours. That's a reduction of 9640 hours in labor that currently helps low wage earners supply their needs. This example is just for a portion of our small farm's operation. For larger farms, these number will be much larger.

The minimum wage increase will also impact our school district's employees and students. We have many classified employees that currently make less than the proposed minimum wage increase, although they do receive very good health insurance as part of their overall compensation. The OSEA union will certainly want to increase wages to some percentage above the increased minimum wage. At a time when the legislature has been looking for ways to provide increased dollars for education, this proposal would end up reducing the available resources for our students. To pay increased wages, our district will likely have to choose to reduce classified staffing in the classrooms, reduce extra-curricular activities, reduce electives, or reduce certified employees and increase class size.

I urge you to oppose any attempt to raise the minimum wage. This proposal is bad for Agriculture, it is bad for business, it is bad for public schools and it is bad for Oregon.

Thank you very much,

Wally Lierman