

## **SB 1532 - Family Farms Cannot Afford Higher Wages**

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**Linda M. Nelsen**

This is an open letter to everyone who is considering the issue of raising the minimum wage beyond the annual built in cost of living increase.

Family Farms cannot afford the higher wages.

I am married to a second generation farmer. We farm 126 acres in Southern Oregon, raising vegetables, hay and a few feeder pigs. We sell our produce on the farm and at Farmers' Markets. This farm was started by my husband's parents in 1959. They put their entire adult lives into building up the farm. When my husband took over the management we were able to expand our production and our market, but along with that comes more expenses. At this point in time, both of the old folks are battling cancer, and we are dealing with the expense of that along with the fact that they can no longer assist with the farm.

During the summer and fall season, we pay people to pick and pack vegetables. We pay them minimum wage. Sometimes we have up to 10 or 12 people on any given week. These workers know they are getting minimum wage and that it is seasonal work. Many of them return every year. They don't expect this to be a high paying job, but for many of them it pays for school clothes for their children.

We live in an economically depressed area and our customers are usually on tight budgets. We raise quality produce that is appreciated by our customers, many of whom are elderly and live on retirement incomes and some of them are dependent on the State issued Farmers Market Nutrition Coupons, and they enjoy the opportunity to buy good, fresh produce at a reasonable price.

If we have to pay up to \$15.00 an hour for help, we would be forced to raise the produce prices beyond what people can afford to pay for food. There is a lot of labor involved in growing produce and getting it to market. We start planting in our greenhouse in January and don't start selling produce until June or July. We have 6 months of farming expense before we see a return. This is just the way it works. Our profit margin is slim to non-existent right now and to add to that burden would probably put us out of business. This would cause great emotional stress to not only my husband and I but to the parents who have devoted their entire adult lives to this farm. It is hard enough on them to give up the actual farming, but to see the business go down the tube would be devastating. Our farm is a familiar institution in our area and we have generations of people who have eaten produce from here.

If we have to pay much more to get our products from the field to the market, we will be forced to use fewer people and grow less produce. That means that fewer people will have summer income, and fewer people will benefit from the availability of fresh produce. This will impact not only our family but also our entire community.

Without the income to sustain the farm as it is now, we could be forced to sell the land to some alternative grower or a developer and then the farm would become another "Used to be.." place along the road.