

Hi,

My name is Vicki Helmig and I am a member of Oregon's agricultural community as I work in the industry on my husband's family's Christmas tree farm. I earned my degree in Agricultural Business Management at Oregon State University and look forward to a lifetime of working in Oregon's agricultural community.

We grow Christmas trees, Hazelnuts and Timber. We already can barely afford to continue growing Christmas trees and have recently diversified in to hazelnuts in hopes of not losing our farm long term. Hazelnuts have a positive outlook, but there are no guarantees in any type of agriculture. The biggest advantage they hold is how much less labor they require to maintain. Even as the prices for Christmas trees are finally going up on our end, the costs that continue to raise still keep us from making much of a profit. If this minimum wage bill passes, it is likely that the Christmas tree industry in Oregon will be over. It is already quickly dwindling as the older generation is wanting to retire and there are not many in my generation willing to continue the work and risk involved in any type of agriculture. Unfortunately, we currently cannot even see an advantage into diversifying into any other crops as they are all very labor intensive like Christmas trees. If this bill passes, I believe we will see an end to most of Oregon's agriculture, not just Christmas trees, and most, if not all, of Oregon's small businesses. This will, of course, increase the cost of food as we will have to import all of it, be it from other states or other countries. This will reduce the quality of nutrition too as it becomes impossible for the average person to afford fruits and vegetables and other "whole" foods. Additionally, it will increase the number of people in the poverty level as jobs become more scarce than they already are. Land will be sold to nut farmers from California that can afford to buy our land or developers, but will not be putting their funds back into our economy as most of them will remain in CA. The developers will begin developing and we will have another housing crash as there are no jobs and the cost of living continues to drastically increase, so OR will not be an affordable place to live. Towns such as the one that I live in that are mostly agricultural communities will trend toward even higher poverty levels than they are already at. Our local elementary school has a terrible poverty level of 65%. This bill will do nothing to improve this, but it absolutely will make it worse. I really hope those who feel this bill is going to do something good for Oregon (they'd have to or they wouldn't vote for it) will reconsider as they hear all of the comments that are made tonight and really listen to what the future of Oregon is going to look like if the mistake of passing this bill is made.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter.

Sincerely,

Vicki Helmig
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