



**Senator Michael Dembrow (D-Portland) and Representative Paul Holvey (D-Eugene)**

**Work Group on Schedules that Work**

**July 18, 2016**

**Comments by Oregon Farm Bureau Federation**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information specific to the agricultural sector concerning mandated predictable and flexible scheduling. As a reference, the Oregon Farm Bureau Federation (OFB) is the state's largest general agriculture trade association, representing approximately 7,000 families engaged in farming and ranching. Oregon farms are 98% family owned and operated and are the cornerstone of many rural communities and economies.

Food and fiber production is unpredictable work and, by its nature, cannot be scheduled days or weeks in advance. Farmers are subject to the most extreme conditions—seasons, weather and instability in the marketplace. Animal health must be managed in real time, and perishable crops must be picked in a timely manner in order to remain marketable. In tree fruit orchards, employee schedules change with heavy rains, extensive heat or freezing conditions. Similar challenges exist on Oregon farms and ranches that raise livestock, and employees may be called in to care for sick or pregnant animals.

Schedule constraints are made more difficult by workforce availability issues in the agricultural sector. Many farmers rely on seasonal labor during the harvest period, and the supply of workers has been steadily declining.<sup>1</sup> The labor shortage has hurt Oregon growers' ability to produce labor-intensive crops and has incentivized many farmers to look to mechanization or crop conversion to cope with workforce pressures. The proposal to mandate predictable and/or flexible schedules will only exacerbate the issue of workforce shortages for Oregon's food producers.

Given the unpredictable nature of agriculture, it is simply not feasible for the Legislature to mandate employee schedules on a farm or ranch. Until farmers can rely on predictable weather, crops and livestock, they will be unable to implement this concept in their workforces. The proposal represents a barrier to the viability of many family farms, and OFB urges that the Work Group to instead focus on streamlining the regulatory environment to sustain these small businesses and encourage their growth into the future.

OFB appreciates the opportunity to submit our comments. Please do not hesitate to contact Jenny Dresler (503-810-4174) at the Oregon Farm Bureau with any questions.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.renewoureconomy.org/research/vanishing-breed-decline-u-s-farm-laborers-last-decade-hurt-u-s-economy-slowed-production-american-farms/>