

April 2nd, 2025

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and members of the Committee of Labor and Housing:

My name is Rick Belanger, President of R. Belanger and Sons Farms, in Lewiston. We are a 3rd generation family farm, operating since 1966. We grow approximately 250 acres of fresh market vegetables; and employ 10 people year-round, and 26 in season.

This bill, LD-589, would remove the exemption of overtime pay for our agricultural employees, which would be detrimental to our employees and the farm.

Our starting pay is \$18.83/hr, and on the upper end, \$25/hr. This time of year, we work 25 to 30 hrs/ week, and during the busy season, 60 to 70hrs/week. We have a hard time recruiting qualified workers, and that is one of the reasons we work so many hours. Our employees know the nature of this business and work these hours with a smile! I am serious! They want as many hours as possible, because they know this is seasonal. There's talk amongst our seasonal crew, where they would most likely not leave their family for 6 months if they were only offered 40 hours/week.

I'm afraid that if I am forced to pay overtime, I will have to grow crops that are highly mechanized for harvesting and planting; and not be able to grow what we currently offer. By changing my crops, this could result in loss of jobs.

Please remember that we are price takers, not price makers. I'm saying this because it would not be profitable paying close to \$30/hr and above to my great crew to pick vegetables, even if I wanted to! Our labor cost last year was 44% of our gross income, which is our biggest expense. This does not include: housing and transportation for my workers, packaging, electricity, fertilizer, seed, insurance, property tax, and fuel.

This bill will negatively affect farmers and farm workers. I am not making this up!

I appreciate my team of people and believe in paying them well, but unfortunately this industry is not like others where we can just pass on our costs to the consumer. If we want our food produced locally here in Maine, we must not add roadblocks to an already tough industry.

I could go on with more of my thoughts, but I have said enough. Thank you for your time and feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Rick Belanger
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