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California

Wage laws will prompt farmers to cut laborers’ hours, survey finds

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Rising costs from California’s new minimum wage and overtime laws will harm the very people they were meant to help — farmworkers, a survey of growers has found.

Produce farmers will try to contain their labor costs by reducing California production, shifting to less labor-intensive crops and mechanization, Western Growers found in a poll of its members.

A little more than 80 percent of farms will reduce hours for farmworkers, and most of the rest don’t know yet if they will, the group found. On average, farmworkers will lose 15 hours of work and \$180 in income a week, a summary of the survey said.

As only 8.1 percent of growers said they’ll be able to pass on rising costs to buyers, 77.7 percent responded that they’ll try to cut costs by mechanizing, Western Growers reported.

“I think that’s a key take-away — that we’re going to see a push toward mechanization to replace our dependence on labor in the future,” said Cory Lundie, the organization’s director of strategic initiatives and communications. “All of this reduces the potential for the farmworker



Courtesy of UCANR

A device for mechanically removing weeds is demonstrated for growers at a field day at University of California-Davis in July. A Western Growers survey finds that many farms will reduce laborers’ hours and look to mechanization in response to California’s new minimum wage and overtime laws.

to earn a living wage.”

The survey’s conclusions are consistent with remarks from other industry representatives after legislators passed bills to raise California’s minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2022 and to apply the state’s regular overtime rules to agriculture.

Beginning in 2022 for most farms and 2025 for operations with 25 or fewer employees, farmworkers will be paid overtime after eight hours in a day and 40 hours in a week rather than the current 10-hour day and 60-hour week for agriculture that Gov. Jerry Brown originally approved during his

first stint as governor in 1976.

The prospect of growers switching from labor-intensive crops to tree nuts and other commodities that can be mechanically harvested “is happening now, and this will just accelerate it,” California Farm Bureau Federation president Paul Wenger said when the overtime bill was signed into law.

The United Farm Workers backed the ag overtime proposal, and president Arturo Rodriguez said in a statement that Brown “corrected a historic wrong and set an example for other states to follow” by signing the bill.

Bill would force schools to seek USDA waiver for imported food

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — A California congressman wants to tighten controls on school districts purchasing imported foods for lunches.

A bill by Rep. John Garamendi, a Democrat, would add teeth to a current law allowing districts to use food that wasn’t produced in the United States if they obtain a waiver from the USDA.

Schools can look overseas for items such as canned fruits and vegetables if the cost of domestic products is significantly higher, but districts don’t always bother seeking the waiver, according to Garamendi’s office.

The lawmaker’s American Food for American Schools Act would make the waiver a legal requirement and mandate that waiver requests be made available to the public.

“Under current law, requesting a waiver is not currently required by law; it’s only in the form of USDA guidelines,” Garamendi press secretary Dante Atkins told the Capital Press. “And because of that, there’s no enforcement mechanism because there isn’t a law to enforce.”

Garamendi said in a statement his bill aims to make sure taxpayer funds support U.S. jobs and businesses and



Rep. John Garamendi

increase the amount of American-grown food that children enjoy through the school lunch program.

The bill follows a multistate outbreak of Hepatitis A linked to frozen strawberries from Egypt that were served in schools and restaurants this fall, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The outbreak sickened 134 people, including one in California and one in Oregon, the CDC reports.

Garamendi’s bill is “(g)ood news for farmers and ag processors,” California Canning Peach Association spokesman John Segale said in an email. The group asserts that school districts that import foods risk the health and safety of schoolchildren as well as the livelihood of farmers and workers.

“Too often, local schools and school districts throughout the U.S. are defying the (current) Buy American Act and using ... tax dollars to purchase and import products from overseas instead of U.S.-produced food products,” he said.

The group notes that districts often purchase canned peaches, canned pears, apple sauce and apple juice from China, which it says is “notorious” for environmental, food safety and

human rights abuses.

Atkins said he doesn’t know how much food used in school meals nationwide is imported. The USDA’s press office did not immediately return a message seeking comment.

Rich Hudgins, the canning peach group’s president, said he’s been told by food distributors and processors that districts in 20 states purchase canned peaches from China. The Egyptian strawberry recall affected 40 school districts in California alone, he said.

“We’ve been trying to make the point in meetings on Capitol Hill that this isn’t just a California-specific problem,” Hudgins said. “The 10 largest school districts in Texas all purchase Chinese canned peaches.”

The original Buy American Act was passed in 1933 and required the U.S. government to prefer American-made products in its purchases. Garamendi’s update, which he introduced Nov. 16, comes amid an “America first” fervor among voters that helped President-elect Donald Trump win on Nov. 8.

But Atkins downplayed the current nationalistic climate as a catalyst for Garamendi’s legislation, noting the congressman “has been focused on a ‘make it in America’ agenda throughout his career in public service.”



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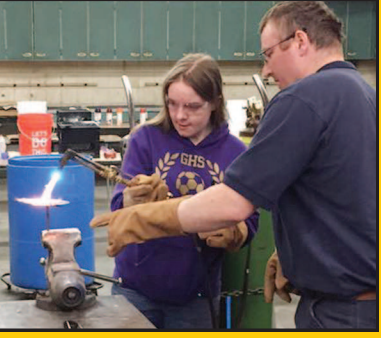
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Goldendale FFA: Leaders in Agricultural Innovation



Industry professional and Goldendale graduate Morgan Gamble assists Rachelle Guthrie in heat treating her metal rose in order to shape the petals.

The Guys in Floral workshop group.



Participants in the Guys in Floral workshop add plant food to their water.

Local Floral shop owner Ken Clark assists FFA member Emerald Johnson in constructing his bud vase arrangement.

By Cassie Kayser
Goldendale, Wash., FFA President

The Goldendale Agriculture Department hosted two Non-Traditional Agriculture Career Nights that led them to two national awards: FFA Model of Innovation and NAAE Ideas Unlimited.

Earlier this year, about 25 female agriculture students participated in the Women in Welding Career Event. The female students came into the GHS agriculture shop and made metal roses using MIG welders and torches with industry professionals. The female students worked with four Goldendale graduates: Morgan Gamble, Mark Hilton, Will Bowdish and Chen Hites as well as a parent, Steve Priddy. All five industry professionals are currently enrolled in post-secondary agricultural mechanics programs and/or working in the agriculture mechanics field.

The purpose of this event was to encourage females to take agriculture mechanics courses at GHS and possibly pursue careers in agriculture mechanics. As stated by Lene Riggers, Women in Welding participant and Goldendale FFA High School treasurer, “Women in Welding showed me something in agriculture I hadn’t considered. The next day, I talked to the counselor and let her know I needed to be in Metal Fab next year.”

A second event, Guys in Floral, was also offered. Debbie and Ken Clark, owners of Clark’s Floral, worked with 25 male agriculture students to construct their own floral arrangement. Additionally, students had the opportunity to ask questions about careers in the floral industry. The purpose of this event was to encourage males to take plant biology at GHS and possibly pursue careers in horticulture.

The two Non-Traditional Agriculture Career Nights were

made possible by a \$3,500 Agriculture Leadership Grant that the Goldendale Agriculture Department was awarded in February.

These two career events led to Goldendale Agriculture Department being selected as National FFA Convention Finalist for Model of Innovation in the Student Section out of over 7,800 FFA chapters. Chapter members Cassandra and Daniel Wedgwood presented the selected activity to a panel of judges this past October at the National FFA Convention in Indianapolis, Ind., and received the chapter’s award on stage in front of over 58,000 members and guests as well as on live television.

“It was an amazing experience to stand on the big stage and accept our award that all our chapter worked so hard to earn,” said Cassandra Wedgwood.

Additionally, Goldendale Agricultural Teachers Randi and Joshua Krieg were awarded the Ideas Unlimited Award for the state of Washington. The Ideas Unlimited contest is designed to give members an opportunity to exchange classroom, SAE, leadership, and other teaching ideas. The Kriegs have qualified to compete at the Regional National Association of Agricultural Education Conference in Wyoming this April.



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