

BARENBRUG

BARENBRUG USA
Plantbreeding, Seed Production, Worldwide Marketing

Macey Wessels
Barenbrug USA
Production Manager

My name is Macey Wessels. I am a farmer in the Scio area, the current President of the Oregon Seed Council and I am the Production Manager for Barenbrug USA.

Barenbrug is a Grass Seed Company located in the Willamette Valley and in Boardman. In the two facilities, we employ more than 90 people year round. Fifty of those employees work in the processing or packing facilities and most of them were hired at minimum wage.

Barenbrug is a Global Seed company with facilities all over the world. I have provided pictures of our packing lines in Holland. In Holland, wage increases forced the move to automation. It now takes 2-3 people to run 2 packing lines that historically would have had at least 12 people running it. As you look through the two sets of pictures, one of the Holland facility and one of our Tangent Oregon facility, I think the biggest thing you will notice is the lack of people when forced to automate.

Automation is not something that we want to do. It makes a large capital investment and flexibility is lost. Most machines limit the size and the types of bags you can pack.

Automation also greatly reduces the number of employees needed to run the facility itself. There are 41 employees that work year round in the Tangent packing facility. We take pride in our employees and encourage their advancement. Three employees in the last six months have had their 35th anniversary working for our company. All three of these employees started on the line and started at minimum wage and moved up to higher paying positions that they are in now.

Automation can be a barrier for new or small businesses entering into an industry due to the large initial investment. Small businesses may be pushed out and new developers deterred because of the expense.

In closing, I believe whole heartedly that many of you want to do what's best for the hard working people of our state. I have seen within my own company that by raising minimum wages, it forces a reduction in labor and ultimately automation. By eliminating jobs, aren't you hurting the people you were initially trying to help? Companies want to employ people and people want to work. Please work on a solution that helps both business and their employees. It should be a synergy because both need each other.

"A company without employees can't exist; but employees without a company, can't either."