



**Comments before the Senate Committee on Rural Development and Economic Development  
Senate Bill 7 – Oregon State Fair and Exposition Center  
By Geoff Horning, Executive Director  
Agri-Business Council of Oregon  
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Chair Roblan and members of the Committee, I am Geoff Horning, Executive Director of the Agri-Business Council of Oregon. I am pleased to offer support for Senate Bill 7 with the -2 amendment.

**Oregon Agriculture and the State Fair**

Much like the State of Oregon, the roots of the Oregon State Fair are directly tied to agriculture. As Oregon agriculture expanded in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century many communities formed agricultural associations for the purpose of sharing information on farming practices and resources. These groups began to organize county fairs such as the Yamhill County Fair, which was the first fair in Oregon in 1850. Shortly thereafter the Oregon Farmer newspaper began calling for a statewide fair, which led to a group of farmers known as the Oregon Fruitgrowers Association organizing the first State Fair in 1858.

I'm not a face you will normally see walking the halls of the Capitol. The mission of the Agri-Business Council of Oregon is very similar to that of those original founders of the Oregon State Fair, which is to engage Oregonians directly through grassroots efforts on the environmental and economic sustainability of Oregon's farming and ranching communities. Agriculture is a critical part of the Oregon economy. It represents 15% of the state's economy, 1 in every 8 jobs, and an Oregon State University study estimates gross farm and ranch sales at \$5.255 billion for 2011, an all-time record. Like those original founders of the State Fair, we appreciate the need for our industry to share information on farming practices and resources to Oregonians who are now more than 3 generations removed from the farm. The State Fair is a critical part of that outreach.

**Event Management**

I have more than 20 years in event management, including the production of some of the largest events at the Oregon Convention Center. Flexibility is the key to successful event management and creates an environment that will allow the State Fair to become financially successful. Current government rules and regulations stifle that flexibility and ability for the State Fair to raise sponsorship funds or provide necessary outreach that can be beneficial to Oregonians. As an example – in 2010 the Agri-Business Council of Oregon partnered with a large Oregon food processor to sponsor a food drive at the Oregon State Fair that would benefit the Oregon Food Bank. The food processor agreed to match any donation made over Labor Day weekend. We requested numerous passes to the fair in order to facilitate drop-off locations at each fair entry. We were told that this was not possible as the fair was limited to how many passes they could provide us per state regulations. Ultimately, we had to significantly scale back our intentions and despite significant publicity prior to the event – we consider our efforts a failure as we were limited to one drop-off location. After the event I personally heard from many people who were frustrated that they brought goods to the fair and couldn't find us. There was no financial benefit to us in having those extra passes. Frankly, the only ones who suffered were Oregon's hungry as our food drive was not as successful as it should have been.

The Agri-Business Council of Oregon applauds Senator Peter Courtney for his work on this bill. The Oregon State Fair is a great resource that we can all take pride in. The current business model is broken and in order to become financially viable it will need to have the flexibility to make quicker decisions and have some autonomy without the barrier that government bureaucracy creates.

The Agri-Business Council of Oregon urges your support for Senate Bill 7 with the -2 amendment.