

Testimony to the Oregon Legislature
February 5, 2013
SB 1541 - The Crop Donation Bill

Good afternoon. My name is Helle Ruddenklau. My husband, Bruce, and I farm about 1,000 acres around the Yamhill/Polk county line.

Bruce and I have been farming for 22 years now. Most of that time we have grown various seed crops, but after getting access to irrigation we have diversified into cannery crops and now grow green beans and sweet corn for National Frozen Foods out of Albany. Bruce and I were not able to take over an established family farm, and it is only in the last 5 years or so, that I have finally felt like we have gotten our feet under us to the point where I am not worried about going broke.

Our history with donating to the Oregon Food Bank started back in 2009 when we had part of a bean field by-passed. This happens when environmental conditions cause multiple fields to ripen at the same time. The processing plant cannot handle it all, so they put a tonnage limit on each field. In our case they harvested 5T/ac and then left the rest. We didn't like seeing the crop wasted, so we called everyone we could think of including the local gleaners and YCAP our local food bank affiliate. They were able to get people to pick for them so salvaged some of the crop that way. We have not had a crop bypassed since then, but it got us thinking about what *we* could do to help the hungry in Oregon. Two years ago I finally called National Frozen Foods before harvest and asked them if it would be ok for us to divert part of the crop to the local food bank. We sign a contract that says that all the crop we produce is for National Frozen Foods, so we had to get their approval. Happily, they were willing to work with us.

I have included some pictures. The first ones are from 2012. The top one shows the bean field when I pulled into it with our farm truck. There are four yellow pickers going in this picture. One of them came over with a partial load which was dumped into the truck. I then took this to McMinnville. It proved to be a bit of a hassle to get the truck unloaded as you can see on page two.

The next page is a couple of months later when the sweet corn was ready. By this time I had talked to John Burt, executive director of Farmers Ending Hunger. It is a group of farmers who have gotten together and regularly donate produce to the Oregon Food Bank. He arranged to have some crates shipped from the Oregon

Food Bank out to McMinnville. This time I took our pickup and a trailer and got the crates loaded up. When the corn was being picked I again went to the field and they were able to load directly into the crates which were then much easier to handle once I brought back to McMinnville.

The next page shows the beans we donated this year. The cardboard boxes were not as nice as the plastic crates, however, that is what was available. The final two pages are of the sweet corn this year. In the first picture with the corn picker, you can see our truck and trailer parked on top of the hill up in the right corner. That is how we normally haul ag commodities. Much easier to handle than in crates on a trailer! However, this system works and it delivers it to the food bank in a way they can handle it.

I am proud of what we are doing and very pleased that we are able to help some Oregon kids have access to fresh green beans and sweet corn. It is a shame that is not a given, but that is the way it is.

I would hope that you in the Oregon Legislature will do your bit to help. The crop donation tax credit should be reinstated. We incur the cost associated with raising a crop which is easily above \$500/ac in just seed, fertilizer and chemicals. We then donate part of that crop which means we give up income. Finally, it takes time, effort and additional expense to get the crop delivered to the local food bank. It would be nice to be able to recoup some of that cost.

But I also think there is a different message as well. It would show that Oregon values what its farmers are doing. I believe that farmers will do as much as they can to help their fellow Oregonians in need. But a tax credit makes it more of a partnership between the state and the farmers to show that we are all working together to eliminate hunger in Oregon.

Thank you.

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