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Testimony in Support of HB 2598 House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

Chair Witt, members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2598 today. This bill is intended to prevent the indiscriminate use of medically important antibiotics for non-therapeutic purposes in livestock, while protecting the ability of farmers and veterinarians to use antibiotics appropriately to treat sick animals and prevent the spread of disease outbreaks.

As an organization representing family scale producers that use antibiotics responsibly, we support HB 2598 as a reasonable step to prevent antibiotic misuse in large-scale animal confinement settings where it is most likely to occur, and to prevent the development and spread of antibiotic resistant bacteria linked to these types of operations. While human health concerns related to antibiotic resistant bacteria are substantial, responsible livestock producers also need antibiotics to work properly when they do need to administer them.

Under HB 2598, producers can continue to use antibiotics to treat sick animals, but would be appropriately prohibited from using medically important antibiotics for non-medical purposes such as growth promotion, weight gain, feed efficiency and 'disease prevention' in healthy groups of animals. Further, Section 4 of the legislation outlines circumstances when farmers may administer antibiotics more broadly when a disease or infection is present within a group of animals and antibiotics are needed to stop an outbreak. We believe these provisions to be quite reasonable, allowing responsible antibiotic use when it is appropriate to treat medical issues.

While some may argue this is a federal matter, the federal Food and Drug Administration has been far too slow to address these issues. Current federal rules for reducing antibiotic use are voluntary and do not address their widespread use on healthy animals as a means of 'disease prevention.' And despite these recent voluntary federal rules, the non-therapeutic use of antibiotics on healthy animals is on the rise, and antibiotic resistant bacteria traced to practices in large concentrated feeding operations (CAFOs) continue to pose a public health threat. In a recent case linked to a company with operations in Oregon, antibiotic resistant salmonella found on Foster Farms chicken sickened over 500 people in 27 states between May 2013 and July 2014.

With regard to larger scale operations, Section 5 of the bill provides a common sense reporting system that would only apply to EPA regulated CAFOs. This provision of the bill would require an annual report from these operations to the Oregon Department of Agriculture that would document the types, amounts, dosages, number and types of animals treated, diseases treated and method of delivery of antibiotics. This type of annual reporting for EPA regulated CAFOs in Oregon is important for tracking how antibiotics are used in these settings, where wide scale use of medically important antibiotics for non-therapeutic purposes on healthy animals is most likely to occur.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this legislation.