

SB 341 Limited Liability Agritourism bill – Public Hearing 5-26-15. House Committee on Consumer Protection and Government Effectiveness

Chair Shemia Fagan, Members of the Committee...thank you for letting me testify

My name is Scottie Jones. My farm is Leaping Lamb Farm in Alsea, west of Corvallis
Images on the screen are of agritourism enterprises around the state and the guests who attend them

Intro –

- Sheep farmer since 2003 with husband
- Agritourism farm stay (lodging) host since 2006, allows farm to be sustainable
- Founder and Exec. Dir. U.S. Farm Stay Association (501c6 trade association) – hear stories from around the country
- One of founding member of Oregon Agritourism Network; helped organize Oregon's first Agritourism Summit at OSU
- Have been one of the members of this bill's work group

What I offer as an agritourism farm stay host to our (urban) guests

- Chance to connect with the farmer, his/her land, hear her story
- Chance to ask questions about what we do, how we do it, why we do it, hands-on experience
- Chance to be in nature and experience unplugged lifestyle
- Chance to eat farm fresh eggs and produce right from the soil
- Education about small scale production, diversified farming techniques

What other agritourism enterprises offer

- Pumpkin patches at E-Z Orchards, flower festivals at Wooden Shoe Tulip festival, you-pick at Fairfield Farm, Plate and Pitchfork dinners, school groups to Molalla elk farm, you-cut Christmas trees, crush parties at vineyards, cattle drives on ranches
- Many entrepreneurial ideas to diversify operations so not held hostage to weather or commodity conditions

What this bill will do to address concerns

- Similar to Equine Limited Liability law, postings will inform guests about dangers on farm land
- Not talking about limiting liability on everything – ex. Keeps being brought up about farmer running over child with tractor. Not about gross negligence. We do our due diligence to protect guests; guests are aware to take care
- Allows farms looking to open agritourism operation fair chance at finding liability insurance
- Maybe eventually insurance rates will drop
- Reduces anxiety on part of farm operators to host guests on their property – we are educators at heart and love to explain what we do. How else will there ever be continuing generations of farmers if we don't give kids the experience of what we do?

Why agritourism is important in Oregon

- Rural economic development – trickle down to communities in which agritourism operation based
- Small farm sustainability – economies of scale don't favor small scale production, so diversification strategies are necessary to remain viable and sustainable
- State (and country) needs small farms to continue heritage lines for livestock and seeds, refinement of low-tech operations, relationship with consumer that not possible from large-scale operations

- Connects urbanites to local food production - something legislature has been interested in with farm to school and healthy food initiatives
- Demonstrates stewardship of land entrusted to us and environmental interests (e.g. land and stream restoration, solar panels, composters)

Other states have already passed a similar bill – at least 22

- CO 2014 -FL
- NM 2013 -KY
- ID 2014 -IN
- NC 2006 -TN
- KS2004 -AL
- VA 2008 -OK
- LA 2008 -ME
- UT -GA
- MS -ND
- SD -WI

Final thoughts: This is a good bill that many people worked hard to find compromise. Not talking about limiting liability on everything, but need to balance the opportunity our agritourism enterprises offer to urbanites with the liabilities we take on when we offer to share our lifestyle and our farms.

Thank you. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.

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