



Oregon Dairy Farmers Association
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SB 1517 TESTIMONY

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES
SENATOR CHRIS EDWARDS, CHAIR

February 3, 2015

Presented by
Tammy Dennee, CMP, CAE – Legislative Director
Oregon Dairy Farmers Association

Chair Edwards and members of the Committee, my name is Tammy Dennee . I am the Legislative Director for the Oregon Dairy Farmers Association headquartered here in Salem. The Association represents the 240 Grade A Dairy Farms in Oregon. These multi generational farms produced fluid milk valued at more than \$650 million dollars in 2014.

I am here today to support SB 1517. The Oregon Dairy Farmers Association supports the testimony offered by Mr. Chad Allen who is a leader in our industry as a member of our Board of Directors.

-In recent years, our dairy farmers have seen an increase in large-scale conservation projects sited on agricultural lands. Projects used to be smaller in scale undertaken in cooperation with landowners. Unfortunately that is not the case with 100% consistency due to an increase in conservation group purchases of agricultural lands and conversion into large-scale wetlands projects.

- These projects can alter the drainage patterns in the area around the project and create flooding issues on neighboring farms. Given that farmers in wetland areas already struggle to combat flooding in wet years, these projects can drastically decrease the productivity of impacted farms.
- Currently, counties have no opportunity to review these projects to determine if they will have a negative impact on agricultural uses in the area.
- (for our Tillamook producers): This issue has become particularly problematic in their County, where the local farmers – most of whom have been in the area for many generations – have found themselves competing with conservation groups for agricultural land to continue to run their operations.

Agriculture forms the backbone of the economy in Tillamook County, and it is essential that these operations continue to coexist with local conservation projects while maintaining the functioning agricultural land base necessary to be successful.

Presently, wetlands projects do not require review under Oregon land use laws for impacts to neighboring agricultural operations. As a result, wetlands projects are often not designed with an eye toward minimizing impacts to neighboring agricultural operations, particularly in regard to hydrologic impacts from the project, and farmers often have no ability to weigh in on the issue of impacts to their operations.

Compounding this issue, agricultural landowners impacted by a wetlands project presently do not have any legal recourse against neighboring landowners, such as conservation groups, who are also project contractors and designers when their wetland projects impact neighboring landowners if OWEB or ODFW were involved in the design or creation of the project (which is almost all projects).

Furthermore, current removal-fill policy from the Department of State Lands makes it difficult for farmers and ranchers to clean existing ditches as necessary to facilitate proper drainage.

The Oregon Dairy Farmers Association supports the legislation proposed by the Oregon Farm Bureau. The legislation as proposed is designed to address these issues and ensure farmers and ranchers in Western Oregon can continue to be partners in conservation while maintaining their farming and ranching operations in the face of increasing conservation projects in their area.

The Legislation accomplishes this by:

- 1) Requiring county review of wetlands projects in agricultural operations in order to ensure that the project is designed to minimize the impacts on agricultural operations;
- 2) By removing the liability shield of landowner contractors and designers – often conservation groups – who engage in wetlands projects, and
- 3) By allowing farmers and ranchers to remove up to 100 cubic yards of material in order to maintain agricultural drainage.

Oregon's Dairy industry is worth protecting and preserving and we encourage every tool be made available to ensure fluid milk production continues in Oregon for generations to come. The number of Oregon Dairies is directly related to the ability of each farm to withstand milk market price fluctuation against the cost of feed, labor, taxes, equipment and much more.

The Oregon Dairy Farmers Association respectfully encourages this committee support and pass SB 1517. The Association sincerely appreciates the willingness of Senator Edwards to participate in the wetlands tour where he was able to understand firsthand the challenges facing our dairy farmers as they attempt to maintain their generational businesses. Thank you for your time and attention to this issue.