



Testimony

House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

February 28, 2017

OFB Supports HB 2533 and HB 2535

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2533 and HB 2535. As a reference, the Oregon Farm Bureau Federation (OFB) is the state's largest general agriculture association, representing 7,000 farm and ranch families actively engaged in agriculture. Our membership includes representatives of over 220 different commodities and a diverse array of production methods.

HB 2533: Hive fee fix

OFB appreciates Representative Jeff Reardon introducing HB 2533 and the -1 amendment, which will cut red tape for Oregon beekeepers. In 2015, HB 3362 added new requirements for the registration and payment of fees for honeybee colonies. Since then, the Department of Justice has determined that the language in statute applies registration and fee requirements to both production and nucleus colonies. This has driven up costs for commercial beekeepers in Oregon, many of whom are already experiencing increases in management costs.

A beekeeper may start with many more nucleus colonies than production colonies, and under current law, would be required to pay fees on all colonies. The -1 amendment to HB 2533 excludes nucleus colonies from the ODA registration fees for honeybee colonies. This fix recognizes the difference between nucleus colonies and production colonies, assessing only production colonies. OFB respectfully asks for your support of HB 2533 with the -1 amendment.

HB 2535: Noxious weed-free pollinator habitat pilot program

OFB asks for your consideration of HB 2535 (and companion legislation SB 814). This legislation will:

1. Help further reduce the proliferation of noxious weeds in Oregon
2. Consider replacement of pollen-rich and nectar-rich noxious weeds with seasonally balanced forage plants that can produce similar levels of pollen to support pollinators

Reduce Noxious Weeds

HB 2535 complements efforts by the State Weed Board, counties and agricultural stakeholders to prevent costly battles against noxious weeds. The state's noxious weed program has faced years of cuts, straining Oregon's economy and impacting agricultural producers. OFB policy supports aggressive management of noxious weeds to stop the spread on farm land, and we believe that HB 2535 bolsters that goal.

Although distinct from efforts in HB 2043 to add capacity back to the weed program, HB 2535 would provide a mechanism to study the feasibility of replacing noxious weeds with non-invasive forbs. The pilot provides an alternative mechanism to support voluntary pollinator forage projects and curb the spread of noxious weeds. OFB believes this work complements other state programs, including eradication efforts by the State Weed Board and the ODOT native grass seed program.

Support Pollinator Nutrition

Managed pollinators and native pollinators provide great benefit to Oregon farmers and consumers. Many products grown in Oregon—pears, apples, cherries and blueberries—rely on bees to pollinate the trees and bushes. Pollinators are also important for seed crops: carrots, broccoli, mustard, onions, cauliflower and cabbage, among others. Pollinators need nectar and pollen from flowers over the course of the year to ensure colony survival (honey bees and bumble bees) or reproductive output (other pollinators). Nutrition plays a key role in pollinator health, particularly when floral forage is scarce in August and September.

Although a combination of factors may contribute to colony mortality, HB 2535 attempts to address two factors: malnutrition and habitat availability. For adequate nutrition, honey bee colonies require ample amounts of carbohydrates and protein. Nectar provides the carbohydrates, and pollen provides the protein. However, in the late summer and fall, just as beekeepers are attempting to build their bees up from six months of providing pollination services, flower sources dry up across the state. Moreover, the lack of flowers at this time hampers the bee's efforts to put up honey reserves for winter. When forage is particularly short, as it was during August and September 2016, beekeepers are forced to use greater amounts of costly feed supplements, which do not provide the complete benefits of floral pollen and nectar. Consequently, honey bees enter the fall weak, suffering from malnutrition, and colony populations decline through the winter. Moreover, while native pollinators also suffer from floral shortages, a number are floral specialists and require specific flowers in order to be successful. HB 2535 takes up this important issue.

HB 2535 would create a voluntary pilot project to evaluate the advantages of replacing pollen-rich noxious weeds with non-invasive forage plants (which typically bloom before the dearth months of August and September) that can produce similar levels of balanced pollen and nectar to support pollinators. The pilot project prioritizes private participants, although public entities may also qualify, and creates test areas on the east side and west side of the state to study geographical challenges. OFB recommends that additional factors be considered in the study design: economic feasibility of replacing

noxious weeds with non-invasive plants, availability and cost of seeds and plant starts, seasonal forage needs, and the practicality of large-scale restoration. We look forward to the opportunity to engage with the ODA on study design and implementation should this legislation move forward.

Pollinator Forage Pilot Program Fund

Given budgetary constraints this session, OFB supports the mechanism in Section 4(2) to allow for grants and private donations to fund the Pollinator Forage Pilot Program. Oregon agriculture is fortunate to have partners at the state and federal level who are looking to make a positive difference on pollinator health, and specifically on forage availability. Just last week for example, Bayer Crop Sciences, in coordination with the new Feed a Bee steering committee, announced a call for proposals to establish additional forage for pollinators in every state by 2018. HB 2535 provides a mechanism to leverage public and private investments in pollinator health, such as the Bayer Feed the Bee initiative, and OFB looks forward to partnering in those efforts.

OFB recognizes the great value that pollinators provide to the industry and supports efforts in HB 2535 to create a voluntary pilot program to encourage private landowners and land managers to enhance pollinator habitat. We respectfully ask the Committee to move HB 2535 forward to continue the discussion.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2533 and HB 2535. Please direct any questions to Jenny Dresler at the Oregon Farm Bureau (jenny@oregonfb.org; 503-810-4174).