

**OREGON WHEAT GROWERS LEAGUE**

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Blake Rowe, Chief Executive Officer

**TO: Senator Floyd Prozanski, Chair, Committee on Judiciary  
Members of Committee**

**FR: Blake Rowe  
CEO, Oregon Wheat Growers League**

**RE: SB 290**

The Oregon Wheat Growers League is proud to represent the nearly 2000 farms across Oregon that produce wheat, one of our State's largest and most valuable crops. Wheat contributes hundreds of millions of dollars in direct and indirect value to Oregon's economy, especially Oregon's rural economy.

In the last few years, fires have become a major concern across much of Oregon. Fire frequency, intensity, and damage have increased and there is no reason to expect these trends to change in the years ahead. This was especially true in 2018. Many Oregon dryland wheat growers across the Columbia Plateau suffered devastating losses to their operations, not just the loss of excellent, high quality wheat, but also lost homes, outbuildings, equipment, fences, and critical vegetative cover to protect their soil. Worst of all, we lost a farmer, working to protect a neighbor's property, to the Substation Fire.

In many areas, our growers were the first to respond to fires, working side-by-side with firefighting crews for days, using their own equipment and their knowledge of the landscape to help contain the fires and stop the damage. They may not be trained professional firefighters, but their expertise and equipment was vital to controlling many of the 2018 wildfires. Many professional firefighters praised the role of the farmers and other volunteers in controlling the fires and reducing fire damages.

We are very appreciative of Senator Hansell and Senator Johnson for sponsoring SB 290. We think it is wise policy to provide some liability protection to volunteers, often first responders, who turn out to help protect their crops, homes, and communities.

We urge you to support SB 290 to help protect our farmers and ranchers, who so graciously commit their lives, equipment, and expertise to help protect their homes, neighbors, and communities when the sparks fly, the smoke billows, and the fires roar.