

Dear Co-Chair Courtney,

We are Sherwood Orchards and we grow tree fruit starting with cherries, plums, apples, pears, prunes, quince and persimmons. We only have family working on our farm and are trying to do what is the best for our customers. Usually we have U-Pick but this year we have to change our business plan because we cannot control how many people come to pick and keep them at a safe distance from each other. We don't have enough hand washing stations or bathrooms on site so we will pick our fruit and hope that our long time customers will purchase it online and come to pick it up. It would ruin us if there was a lawsuit. This farm started in 1862 and it would be shameful to lose the 158 years providing the Sherwood/Portland community with locally grown fruits.

In the last 3 months, Oregon's farms have been put in an impossible situation - agriculture is critical infrastructure, necessary to keeping Oregon's food supply stable during the pandemic. But as the science around COVID-19 has developed in unpredictable ways, so have the practices and rules for maintaining a safe workplace. At times, these rules have been conflicting and confusing, which has left Oregon's farms ranches at risk for opportunistic lawsuits - we need the legislature to step in!

Even if a farm or ranch is following all state and federal health guidelines and new OR-OSHA rules, an employee or customer can still contract COVID-19 off-site. There is simply no way to prevent COVID-19 from entering the workplace, especially as Oregon continues to reopen. We are very concerned about lawsuits seeking damages from the operation for circumstances outside of the farm's control.

One lawsuit or demand letter could devastate a family farm, regardless of the steps the farm took to protect employee health. We need to know that if farms are implementing guidance and rules from public health and safety officials, they will be protected from unfair lawsuits that will drain cash reserves.

We need your help - please act today to please pass temporary and targeted liability protections for farms that are doing everything they can to protect employees from COVID-19 and produce the food we all need!

Sincerely,

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