

Dear Co-Chair Kotek,

I am Robert J. Crouse a third generation farmer and owner of Fort Vannoy Farms, Inc. located outside Grants Pass in Josephine Co.. I am also the President of Josephine County Farm Bureau and am writing on behalf of the Farm bureau. My story is similar to most of the members. My family started as a diversified farm selling direct to customers and wholesalers, then for 70 years was primarily a dairy farm. With the decline in dairy prices we have had to change back to direct marketing of produce at the retail level. We have also doing a pumpkin patch corn maze to direct market to the public. We also sell garlic for seed to a company in california and grow forage for horses and cattle. We have followed the OSHA rules to protect employees, and have an open building to market the vegetables in so there is lots of air flow to limit exposure to our employees and the public. Without some protection from lawsuits for things out of our control we could be put out of business. As a small farm I do not have the resources to withstand such a lawsuit. I and other small farms like myself need your help.

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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