

April 1, 2021
Senate Committee on Energy and the Environment

Testimony in Strong Support of SB 583

Dear Chair Beyer, Vice Chair Findley, and Esteemed Members of the Committee on Energy and the Environment:

Mercy For Animals, a nonprofit organization with approximately 3,100 supporters and six full-time staff members in Oregon (including the undersigned, a Redmond resident) dedicated to constructing a more compassionate food system for all, **urges the committee to support SB 583, legislation that would place a moratorium on development of new mega dairies—operations with more than 2,500 cows—and expansion of existing ones.**

Animal Welfare

The majority of cows in mega dairies live almost their entire lives indoors, with nearly 40 percent of farms confining cows in cruel tie stalls barely larger than their bodies, rendering the animals unable to turn around.¹ Cows eat, sleep, urinate, defecate, and give birth in these stalls. They rarely have access to the outdoors and are prevented from expressing many natural behaviors, such as grazing.² When cows are no longer of use, whether because they can no longer be impregnated, their production drops, or they become a financial burden because of illness or injury, they are sold for slaughter.³

Intensively confined cows more often suffer from clinical diseases such as mastitis, metritis, and lameness. In 2013, about 2.33 million dairy cows (or one in four) suffered from mastitis, a serious disease affecting a cow's mammary glands.⁴ And that same year, 16.8 percent of U.S. dairy cows suffered from lameness, not including the more than 200,000 "downer" cows unable to walk.⁵

Oregon has a vested interest in promoting the well-being of all animals. Notably, Oregon law recognizes that all nonhuman mammals are "sentient beings capable of experiencing pain, stress, and fear."⁶ By supporting SB 583, Oregon builds on past leadership regarding animal welfare.

Environmental Justice

Environmental justice and our food system are inextricably linked, and low-income people and communities of color are most impacted by system failures. Some of Oregon's largest mega dairies are situated in rural Latinx and Hispanic communities. Consequently, these communities

¹ H.W. Barkema et al., *Invited Review: Changes in the Dairy Industry Affecting Dairy Cattle Health and Welfare*, 98 J. Dairy Sci., 7426 (2015).

² R. Mandel, H.R. Whay, E. Klement & C.J. Nicol, *Invited Review: Environmental Enrichment of Dairy Cows and Calves in Indoor Housing*, 99 J. Dairy Sci., 1695 (2016).

³ United States Department of Agriculture, *Dairy 2014: Health and Management Practices on U.S. Dairy Operations*, 2014, 15 (2018).

⁴ *Id.* at 8.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ ORS § 167.305(1).



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experience higher rates of water, air, and ground pollution. No community should suffer health harms for private profit. By supporting SB 583, Oregon would be taking a much-needed step toward prioritizing the needs of low-income communities and communities of color and more adequately addressing the unequal burdens of pollution.

Supporting Family Farms

As consumers become more conscious of the products they buy, many opt for products from animals raised according to higher animal welfare standards. Small, welfare-oriented family farms typically abide by such standards, while mega dairies do not. Oregon's small and mid-size dairies have declined significantly since mega dairies, such as Threemile Canyon Farms, began operating in the 1990s; an average of nine family dairy farms went out of business each month between 2002 and 2007.⁷ SB 583 would help prevent large, vertically integrated and out-of-state companies from moving into Oregon and threatening small family farms. This important legislation would also help small family farms get a competitive edge on mega dairies, which would stimulate our local economies and support existing efforts, such as Oregon State University's Small Farms Program.

SB 583 would prohibit the development of new mega dairies and the expansion of existing ones. This moratorium would grant Oregon the time it needs to address existing environmental justice, animal welfare, and economic harms caused by mega dairies. We must do more to protect all Oregonians before it is too late. **Accordingly, Mercy For Animals urges this committee to support SB 583.**

Sincerely,
Mercy For Animals

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⁷ Kathleen Bauer, *Big Milk: Big Issues for Local Communities*, Edible Portland, Nov. 1, 2017, at 2.