

Testimony opposing Oregon SB199

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Please vote against SB199.

Taking away our ability to control rodents in our orchards would make it impossible to farm and grow food. Pocket gophers kill our trees and endanger our employees.

I'm a pear and cherry producer in the upper Hood River Valley. Many of the threats facing our industry are beyond our control: consolidation of grocery chains, scarce labor, climate change, low fruit prices and rising production costs.

So we work hard to control the things we are able to.

GOPHERS AND TREES

A major challenge we face every day, before any of those listed above, is pocket gophers. They damage our trees and pose a hazard to the folks harvesting our crops.

If we were prevented from controlling gophers we would not be able to keep our orchards alive and producing. The voracious rodents find our newly planted trees, and can kill them in a few minutes. It costs \$15 to buy a tree, and at least \$20 to plant it. We plant 200-500/acre. That is \$7000-\$17,500 per acre just for planting the trees when we start a new block. (In addition we have irrigation installation, tree training, etc. invested in each acre.)

With constant, vigilant gopher control we can usually keep the tree loss to 10%. If we were not able to control them, I doubt we could keep half our trees alive. Clearly we would be unsustainable economically.

If you've never seen gopher damage, imagine a newly planted tree, with a trunk less than an inch in diameter. Gophers love tender young roots, and the recently disturbed soft ground. So they will follow an entire newly planted tree row underground, eating the roots and leaving stems that resemble large sharpened pencils, dying in place.

I have included 3 photos: 1) of a dead 1 year old tree, with every single root chewed off underground, 2)a dead newly planted tree, and 3) a closeup of the nubbin left where the roots are supposed to be. We discover many every year, in spite of control efforts.

This problem may seem inconsequential. It is not.

The better we farm, the healthier our trees, and the more gophers plague us.

We trap regularly, and I have started keeping track of the population.

In 2019 we trapped 691 gophers on 24 acres of orchard. 29 per acre.

That's how many are left when we work all year to control them. And they eat our tree roots of every age, killing the young trees outright, weakening the larger ones.

GOPHERS AND WORKER ACCIDENTS

Gopher holes also pose a danger to those working on ladders. If a ladder “tongue” is inadvertently set above a shallow but invisible gopher tunnel, the weight of the person climbing the ladder can push the tongue suddenly into the ground, causing the ladder to tip over. Gopher tunnels can cause serious accidents. Falling suddenly into a gopher tunnel can easily sprain an ankle or damage a knee. Our employees want and need the orchard to be free of gopher tunnels.

Please protect our family farms, your food supply and the safety of workers

VOTE AGAINST SB199





