



March 3, 2023

RE: Testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 85

Chair Golden and Members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources:

Beef Northwest Feeders, LLC is a family-owned business located in North Powder, Oregon with other Oregon based operations in Union, Wallowa, Malheur, Umatilla, and Morrow Counties. What began in the 1870s as the Wilson Cattle Company, Beef Northwest developed into a people-focused company where together we care for cattle and produce healthy beef for consumers in a responsible, sustainable way. Since our founding in 1990, Beef Northwest Feeders has routinely gone beyond regulatory environmental requirements, exceeding established standards. Consequently, Beef Northwest has been recognized for our commitment to sustainable practices through national trade organizations and independent animal welfare audits.

SB 85 (-1) is unnecessary and unfair to those that operate responsibly and ethically. The amendment proposes to arbitrarily prohibit the Oregon Department of Agriculture from issuing Confined Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) permits to operations that have over a certain number of animals. However, based on the testimony from the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA), Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), and the Oregon Water Resources Department to this very Committee, it was demonstrated that our state has one of the strongest CAFO programs in the country and protective of Oregon's environment. For that reason, Oregon elected and public officials should be proud of the CAFO program that continues to protect our state's natural resources while retaining a robust economy that provides \$5.01 billion in agricultural production and 616,341 jobs ([Oregon State Board of Agriculture 2021 report](#)).

Moreover, SB 85 (-1) would prohibit the ODA and DEQ from issuing CAFO permits to Tier II CAFOs, even if it is a Tier II CAFO with a record of complying with Oregon's environmental laws. For us that means when any of our existing CAFOs need a permit renewal (typically every 5-years), we will be required lay-off employees (including UFW employees), sell animals, and financially may even be required to sell our Oregon facilities and instead expand in our neighboring states. This cannot be the result the legislature is intending with this bill.

There is a concerning trend emerging where legislation seeks to pit so-called "family farms" against other types of operations, namely "industrial" CAFOs that are depicted as cold, faceless businesses. This is a false narrative. We are a family-owned business that would be impacted by SB 85. Nothing about our ranches is industrial. The people who own or work at farms and ranches across Oregon are family members who are dedicated to the land and to providing the utmost care for the well-being of the animals. Beef Northwest is a company run by 4th, 5th, and 6th generation Oregonians. BNW employs numerous families that spread generations. Many of them started as classic immigrant stories that have found success in our company and with that, seek to give to their communities.

It seems that every legislative session, special interest groups make statements to use a farm's size as a proxy for determining whether that farm is a responsible actor to its employees, animals, and the environment. Farm size is NOT a determining factor of a farm's ethic.

- **We protect our resources.** Our ranches in Wallowa County were the first to work with the Nature Conservancy to add conservation easements to the land. This ensures that our portion of the Zumwalt Prairie, North America's largest remaining grassland of its type, will remain grassland and never be threatened by development. Moreover, Beef Northwest uses biproduct from potato plants around the region to feed our animals a nutritious diet. This not only serves the animals, but also reduces food waste that would end up in local landfills and further strengthen local markets for local farmers.
- **We excel in animal welfare.** We are deeply committed to superior quality of life for each animal under our care. Our cattle always have access to fresh water and feed; noise levels are kept at a minimal level and human contact is minimized. We were the first cattle feeding operation in the country to receive the Global Animal Partnership's (G.A.P) Beef Cattle certification. This certification is a stringent, 3rd party verified, animal welfare standard. Beef Northwest was also an early adopter of Progressive Beef, another 3rd party verified program that ties together Animal Welfare, Food Safety, and Sustainability to provide quality beef to the consumer. These are simply two examples of programs Beef Northwest voluntarily participates in to keep our operation at a high operational standard.
- **We take care of our team and our community.** Beef Northwest Feeders has been a dedicated member in our communities for six generations. We are committed to being a trusted employer and good neighbor as well as a steady contributor to the economy and county tax base. We provide strong career opportunities; farm and livestock hourly employees enjoy benefits as members of the United Farm Workers union under which they enjoy a competitive wage, as well as health and welfare benefits. Beef Northwest also offers scholarships to children of employees to ensure the next generation have the opportunity of further education.

In short, like other Oregon family farmers and ranchers, we care deeply about being good stewards of the environment, ethical treatment of animals and strong commitment to workers and our local communities. **And, despite claims to the contrary, Oregon needs farms of all sizes to meet the nutritional needs of a growing population.** A moratorium on CAFO permits will not improve the environment but instead, hurt thousands of families that rely on CAFOs for jobs, community support and a strong source of locally produced food.

Sincerely,

Zach Wilson
Owner, Beef Northwest Feeders