

March 6, 2023

To the Senate Committee on Natural Resources:

I am a retired primary care and public health physician and lifelong resident of Oregon. I am writing in support of SB 85, to ban further development of factory farms (Confined Animal Feeding Operations or CAFOs) in the state. This bill is immensely important if we Oregonians are serious about addressing climate change, public health, animal welfare and environmental justice.

I am particularly concerned about proposals of Foster Farms for chicken farms near or on the banks of the North Santiam River, where we own a small home. Neighbors tell us about how the river used to be packed with migrating steelhead and other fish. Not so any more. Spilling nitrates into the river from chicken farms will only further blight this once pristine waterway.

There is very little to recommend CAFOs. The industrialization of meat and dairy does result in lower food prices (as well as higher corporate profits), but at tremendous hidden cost. They put public health at risk, contribute to global warming, increase rural poverty by replacing family farms with dangerous, low paid jobs, and disproportionately affect low income, rural and BIPOC communities.

Adverse public health effects are due to air pollution, most significantly with particulate matter, and soil, ground water and waterway contamination with nitrates. A recent study indicates that nationwide animal agriculture results in more than 12,000 premature deaths annually due to air and water contamination. 99% of farmed animals in this country are farmed on CAFOs, where waste management is poorly regulated and results in widespread release of nitrates and other toxins into the soil, air and water. At least one study suggests that emissions could be halved if these harmful practices were banned.

These toxic releases cause a host of problems, including cardiovascular disease, asthma and other pulmonary disorders, cancer, birth defects and other problems. Studies have shown up to 30% higher mortality in areas where residents live in proximity to factory farms.

Up to 25% of global greenhouse gas emissions come from agriculture and 80% of that comes from animal agriculture, which again, nearly exclusively involves CAFOs. We have done next to nothing in the state of Oregon to address this very significant contribution to global warming, which threatens our very existence.

This is also an issue of environmental justice, since most CAFOs are situated in communities that are disproportionately rural, low income and people of color. The workers on these farms are particularly at risk for exposure to pollutants. The work is

low paid, dirty, and harmful to health. Treatment of the animals farmed is well-documented to be inhumane and unethical.

The ultimate solution to factory farms is to reduce our consumption of meat, but that is a long term and difficult cultural shift. In the meantime, we need to protect our environment, guard our public health and reduce our contribution to greenhouse gas emissions. Preventing the proliferation of CAFOs is one, very significant step that we can take.

Respectfully submitted:

Patricia Kullberg, MD MPH

Selected References:

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