

March 21, 2019

Testimony in Support of SB 103

Dear Chair Dembrow and Members of the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources:

My name is Amy Wong and I am active in regenerative agriculture issues in Oregon. I am writing to urge you to support SB 103, or another legislative vehicle, that would impose limits on mega-dairies in order to protect the state from the negative impacts that were seen with the disastrous Lost Valley dairy operation.

Oregon needs a “time out” on new and expanding mega-dairies. As another industry giant prepares to take over the Lost Valley site, it has never been more clear that the dangerous, illegal practices inflicted on Oregon were not limited to that operation. Unlike small or mid-sized family dairies, these massive operations confine thousands of animals and generate enormous, unmanageable quantities of waste.

I have heard the opposition to SB 103 state that the size of a dairy doesn't matter—rather how it is managed is what should be considered—and that the legislation singles out large operations. However, the size of a dairy does matter in terms of dispersed pollution. There simply is no safe way to dispose of the amount of manure that was produced at that site, and potentially will be produced again. And in scenarios in which there is no realistic safe way for the waste to be managed, the dairy should not be allowed to operate.

At the Lost Valley site, advocacy groups raised several red flags, multiple times, prior to and during, the dairy's construction and tenure that went unheeded. And as time went on, the flagged potential situations became actual problems with considerable environmental and human consequences. When agencies do not adequately manage situations in which they have been warned about repeatedly, it is time for the legislature to step in to protect Oregon from similar scenarios in the future.

Another reason that you should support SB 103 is that mega-dairies that externalize environmental and human costs over-produce milk at a rate that is far below that of their small and mid-size competitors, many of whom better manage environmental and human externalities. The mega-dairies are able to flood the market with cheap dairy products, which small and mid-size dairy farmers cannot compete with, putting them out of business. Mega-dairies pumping out an oversupply of cheap milk are the cause of the economic crisis in the dairy sector—not the lack of additional mega-dairies.

As the state has seen in the Oregonian's Polluted by Money series (see: <https://projects.oregonlive.com/polluted-by-money/>), environmental policy in Oregon has been influenced by corporate donations. In my work in the agriculture sector, I have been coming up against this schism for years. Groups that receive the majority of their funding from corporate sources with business interests at heart, not what is best for all Oregonians, have outsized policy influence. These groups have spun a narrative that bigger is better, and that we need vertically-integrated, chemical-intensive systems of agriculture in order to feed the state. The rationale for mega-dairies fits right into this picture.

The nonprofit that I represent, and the coalition of nonprofits that we work with, advocate for a different approach to agriculture in Oregon—one that keeps small and mid-size dairies in business on a level playing field, and one in which we better manage the environmental and human costs of doing business. We would like to see vibrant rural economies and healthy communities and we do not need mega-dairies to accomplish this. If the state doesn't have the ability to say no to corporate influences, the legislature needs to act to protect the people.

Please support limits on mega-dairies.

Most sincerely,

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