

April 1, 2021

Re: Support for SB 583, Relating to industrial dairies, declaring an emergency.

Chair Beyer and Members of the Senate Committee on Energy and Environment,

My name is Gene Baur. I have a master's degree in agricultural economics from Cornell University, where I studied the impacts of large-scale dairies on smaller farms and agricultural communities. I'm also the president of Farm Sanctuary, a nonprofit organization that works to prevent the harms of industrial animal agriculture, and I am writing on behalf of our 1.6 million members and constituents to urge your support of SB 583.

This commonsense measure will help protect Oregon citizens, family farmers, and lessen the destructive societal impacts of factory farming by placing a moratorium on Mega-dairies with over 2,500 cows. SB 583 is critical for protecting the livelihoods of Oregon's dairy farmers. The state's numbers of small and mid-sized dairy farmers have significantly declined since Threemile Canyon farms, the largest dairy farm in OR, started operating in 1999. Mega-dairies throughout the state are driving small dairy farmers out of business: an average of 9 family dairy farms had to close their doors every month between 2002 and 2007.<sup>1</sup> The struggle of small-mid scale dairy farms in Oregon reflects a growing national trend. 2019 saw the largest annual decline in licensed dairy farms in 15 years. From 2007 to 2017, more than one third of small dairy farmers ceased operations.<sup>2</sup>

Mega-dairies also demand excessive quantities of water and other resources while polluting the land, water, and air. These farms and other forms of industrial animal agriculture are major contributors to our planet's most significant ecological threats, including the loss of biodiversity and the climate crisis. As a significant and direct contributor of all three major greenhouse gasses,<sup>3</sup> animal agriculture accounts for more than one-eighth (14.5%) of greenhouse gas emissions that are caused by human activities.<sup>4</sup> In Oregon, agriculture is the leading source of methane emissions<sup>5</sup> due to the methane released by Mega-dairies, which also produce other toxic greenhouse gasses like nitrous oxide.<sup>6</sup> In addition to driving global climate change,

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<sup>1</sup> Bauer, K. "Big milk: Big issues for local communities." Edible Portland. November 1, 2017

<sup>2</sup> United States Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service, *Milk Production: February 2020*, 18.

<sup>3</sup> Steinfeld, H., Gerber, P., Wassenaar, T., Castel, V., Rosales, M., and de Haan, C. 2006. *Livestock's long shadow: environmental issues and options*. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, p. 82.

<sup>4</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *Key Facts and Findings*.

<sup>5</sup> Oregon Global Warming Commission. "2018 Biennial Report to the Legislature: For the 2019 Legislative Session." 2018.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). "Greenhouse Gas Emissions: Overview of Greenhouse Gases." Available at <https://www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/overview-greenhouse-gases>

industrial animal agriculture operations like Mega-dairies cause pathogen-laden fumes that result in far more than mere nuisance. Fumes result in elevated rates of lung disease, such as asthma and bronchitis, among farm workers and local communities.<sup>7</sup>

Mega-dairies and other factory farms are notorious for making others pay for their irresponsible practices, while obtaining preferential access to water and other increasingly scarce natural resources. For example, ODA records demonstrate that despite permit requirements, Mega-dairies in Oregon do not always keep manure pollution from reaching local waterways,<sup>8</sup> polluting the groundwater that communities rely on for drinking water.<sup>9</sup> They have received undue government support, with the biggest farms getting the largest subsidies, at the expense of the common good. By enacting SB 583, the Oregon legislature can help limit the harms of these extractive and unsustainable operations.

Factory farms lack adequate transparency and regulatory oversight, and commonly engage in deceptive marketing and greenwashing activities, such as promoting the idea that using methane digesters for animal excrement is a viable solution to the climate crisis. In fact, cows emit greenhouse gas emissions besides in their waste, while growing crops to feed farm animals produces more. Government programs that have helped fund these misguided investments, purportedly to produce energy from waste, are false solutions and perpetuate an inherently damaging and inefficient system.

Citizens in Oregon and across the United States care about how their food is produced, and they oppose irresponsible agricultural practices. Enacting SB 583 will uphold the values and interests of Oregonians, and it deserves your support.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

Gene Baur  
President and Co-founder  
Farm Sanctuary

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<sup>7</sup> Hribar, C. 2010. *Understanding Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations and Their Impact on Communities*. National Association of Local Boards of Health, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> ODA. “Confined Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) Program 2017 Annual Report.” 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). “Estimation of Nitrogen Sources, Nitrogen Applied, and Nitrogen Leached to Groundwater in the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area.” June 13, 2011 at ii and 1; Oregon DEQ. “Analysis of Groundwater Nitrate Concentrations in the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area.” February 23, 2012 at Table 5-1, Table 5-2 and Figure 1-1; Oregon DEQ and ODA. “Lost Valley Farm CAFO Permit — Frequently asked questions.”