

OREGON



PHYSICIANS  
FOR SOCIAL  
RESPONSIBILITY

1 April 2021

To: Senate Committee on Energy & Environment

**RE: Oregon Senate Bill 583, Restricting New or Expanded Mega-Dairies**

Chair Beyer, Vice-Chair Findley, and members of the committee,

Guided by the values and expertise of medicine and public health, Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) works to protect human life from the gravest threats to health and survival. We are an organization of over 2,800 health professionals and public health advocates statewide working collaboratively with community partners to educate and advocate for societal and policy change that protects human health at the local, state, national, and international level. We seek a healthy, just, and peaceful world for present and future generations.

Oregon PSR supports Senate Bill 583, which would ban new or expanded mega-dairies over the threshold of 2,500 cows in Oregon. As an organization that works to address the human health impacts of climate change and environmental pollution, we feel compelled to outline concerns about both the indirect and direct impacts of large-scale, consolidated dairy operations on public health and wellbeing. The American Public Health Association adopted a policy statement in 2019 that calls for a moratorium on concentrated animal feeding operations until we can better understand and address their impacts on public health.<sup>1</sup>

First, livestock production accounts for 14.5% of global greenhouse gas emissions worldwide, and methane digesters at mega-dairies are not capturing enough of this highly potent greenhouse gas to justify expansion of these operations.<sup>2</sup> As climate disasters in Oregon ranging from extreme wildfires, ice storms, and summer heat waves increase in intensity and frequency, we cannot afford to expand the largest contributions to global climate change. Even more climate impacts to health and safety in Oregon can be expected in the form of harmful water algal blooms, coastal sea level rise and erosion, reduced snowpack and

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<sup>1</sup> Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future. "American Public Health Association calls for a national moratorium on new and expanded concentrated animal feeding operations," June 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Gerber, P. J. et al. (2013). *Tackling Climate Change Through Livestock: A Global Assessment of Emissions and Mitigation Opportunities*. Rome: FAO at xii.



drought, especially in Central & Eastern Oregon, and winter flash flooding.<sup>3</sup> These impacts are already being felt most acutely by low-income Oregonians, rural and coastal communities, and Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities across the state.

Second, the air and water impacts of consolidated animal feeding operations threaten our water resources, quality, and environmental health. In 2019 the manure from Oregon's mega-dairies totalled 6.5 billion pounds--twice the total waste produced by the Portland Metropolitan area.<sup>4</sup> This manure emits criteria air pollutants including ammonia, hydrogen sulfide, and particulate matter, and there is no safe threshold for human exposure to these pollutants. Emerging public health research shows that communities exposed to higher amounts of particulate matter have had worse outcomes and higher death rates from COVID-19.<sup>5</sup> These air pollutants also have enormous impacts on health care costs: In 2017, Oregonians spent \$28 million on asthma-related hospital visits. Furthermore, Oregon's Department of Environmental Quality has identified confined animal feed operations as a primary source of dangerous nitrate contamination that threatens community health in the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area.<sup>6</sup>

The role of agriculture in providing living-wage jobs, which are an important social determinant of health, is not to be discounted. But Senate Bill 583 does not impact existing mega-dairies or small-scale operations. By supporting environmentally sustainable livestock operations we can ensure that air and water quality are preserved while keeping Oregonians employed and reigning in our agricultural greenhouse gas emissions, which, in turn, protects the health and wellbeing of agricultural workers.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important bill. Sincerely,



Damon Motz-Storey, Healthy Climate Program Director  
Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility

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<sup>3</sup> 4th National Climate Assessment, Northwest United States

<https://nca2018.globalchange.gov/chapter/24/>

<sup>4</sup> FWW analysis of ODA (2019); FWW. "Factory Farm Nation: 2020 Edition." April 2020 at 10.

<sup>5</sup>

<https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/hsph-in-the-news/air-pollution-linked-with-higher-covid-19-death-rate/>

<sup>6</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, Figure 1-1; Oregon DEQ. ODA. "Lost Valley Farm CAFO Permit – Frequently asked questions." at 1.

