



Locally Grown
and
GROWING STRONG

House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Management

OFB Testimony on HB 2234

February 9, 2021

Chair Evans, Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to express concerns about HB 2234. By way of background, the Oregon Farm Bureau (OFB) is the state's largest agricultural trade association, representing nearly 7,000 farm and ranch families in the state.

Whether it is through their careers, volunteer opportunities, or responsibilities as rural landowners, Oregon's farmers and ranchers frequently interact with wildfire on the landscape. Rural Oregonians were severely impacted by the unprecedented wildfires that occurred over Labor Day weekend. Many OFB members were on the front lines in their communities, evacuating and caring for their employees, neighbors, animals, and friends who were in danger. Those who lost homes across the state were largely members of the agricultural community, including over a hundred agricultural employees whose homes were decimated by the Almeda Fire. In sum, Oregon's farmers and ranchers fully recognize the need for effective solutions to wildfire suppression and preparedness, including the desire to prepare our homes and structures as best we can.

With this in mind, OFB has concerns with HB 2234, as certain components of the bill are fairly broad, confusing, and need further discussion. For example, the provisions of Section 2 appear to require a complete overhaul of structural code standards for all buildings and structures, new and existing, in all areas that are "susceptible to wildfires." First, it is unclear what "susceptible to wildfires" means and this term should be defined in the bill. Second, the bill applies retroactively to existing buildings. It will be impractical for many landowners to apply new structural standards to buildings that already exist, and will be highly expensive depending on the nature of the structure (exempt building or an older building), and availability of materials.

The costs associated with this bill will likely be particularly high for agricultural buildings, with little measurable value for fire protection. Agricultural buildings are generally unoccupied, and are not used for sleeping, drinking, or other activities that are considered hazardous for surviving a fire. Agricultural buildings are often remote, in low-density areas, and away from other

structures not located on the same property. Imposing new fire protection standards for agricultural buildings would saddle rural landowners with arbitrary costs when robust fire protection standards are more appropriate for structures with actual occupancy or in high-density areas.

For these reasons, OFB has concerns about HB 2234 as currently drafted and would like to have more discussions about changing structural code standards before passing legislation that will impact all buildings in the state. Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments today. Please do not hesitate to reach out with questions or concerns.

Samantha Bayer
Policy Counsel
Oregon Farm Bureau
samantha@oregonfb.org