



**TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 5555  
SUBMITTED BY TREVOR BELTZ,  
ON BEHALF OF TILLAMOOK COUNTY CREAMERY ASSOCIATION  
JOINT COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS  
APRIL 24, 2021**

Chairs Johnson, Steiner Hayward, Rayfield, and Members of the Committee,

Tillamook County Creamery Association (TCCA) is a 112-year-old farmer-owned, farmer-led cooperative, which is known for the quality of the products we produce and for our commitment to working collaboratively with a diverse set of stakeholders to solve complex problems. For generations, our farmers have worked to conserve air, land, and water as their livelihoods depend on it. We're dedicated to continually improving agricultural practices, leveraging everything from scientific and technological breakthroughs to our farmers intergenerational knowledge about the land. Digital equity is one such problem our co-op has identified as a priority.

There are about 80 farm owners in the cooperative, with varying connection to the internet. Access to broadband, or faster broadband, allows them to implement technological solutions to make their jobs easier. There are device applications in herd management – tags or collars on each cow that provide live data on nutrition, health analytics and early disease detection; applications in precision feeding, which connect to herd management devices to calibrate and distribute optimal feed, decreasing food waste and cost; and applications in milk tank reporting, allowing constant monitoring of temperature and pH balance. These solutions allow dairymen and women to better meet herd needs. Happier cows lead to higher quality milk, and for producers like TCCA, results in a better end product.

Technology allows farm owners to aggregate, analyze, and act on data collected. Analytics and monitoring take up bandwidth - if speeds are too slow to upload data, or there is not enough bandwidth to support technological investments, farmers begin



looking for solutions elsewhere. Utilizing new technology can increase flexibility, allowing time and talent to be directed to forward planning and more advanced tasks. A 2019 USDA study found potential economic benefit of expanding digital technologies in ag at \$47-\$65 billion annually in additional gross benefit to US economy, \$7.8-\$10.5 billion directly related to livestock.<sup>1</sup>

There are many co-benefits to investments in digital equity efforts in rural areas - to quote from the Oregon Broadband Advisory Council's Broadband in 2020 Oregon Report:

*"Investments in broadband for agricultural business purposes will enhance other aspects of rural life. From rural healthcare options, to first response communications, to telework opportunities, to education. Of particular note, is the issue of first response. Rural agriculture producer are also typically the first responders as they compose the bulk of rural fire protection districts and are the knowledgeable landowners. Communications networks are critical for emergency response and public safety."<sup>2</sup>*

As part of the agricultural community TCCA participates in the American Connection Project Broadband Coalition. The coalition is a collection of over 140 major companies and trade associations - representing agriculture, financial services, health care and technology - advocating for robust funding for federal investment in broadband internet connectivity to advance telehealth, distance learning and the tremendous economic value that comes with internet connectivity. Our coalition priorities are to increase funding to fill gaps in poor infrastructure; better mapping; and coordination across levels of government.

Our ask to this committee is threefold:

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<sup>1</sup> USDA, *A Case for Rural Broadband* (2019). <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/case-for-rural-broadband.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.oregon4biz.com/Broadband-Office/OBAC/Reports/BroadbandRpt2020.pdf>



1. Initiate partnerships with other state agencies, local and county governments, and other entities to kickstart broadband investments in preparation for anticipated federal infrastructure funding package
2. Leverage anchor institutions to provide rapid community internet service. Build on the work of LinkOR and others.
3. Our most direct ask of you - Provide state broadband investment of \$100 million in loans and grants and staff the state broadband office as proposed in Governors recommended budget. In agricultural rural areas, low population densities make new investment uneconomic for traditional providers. State investments have the potential to reduce these barriers for new and alternative providers to enter those markets and will increase digital equity for rural Oregonians.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.