

March 6, 2023

Chair Golden and committee,

I am Jayesh Palshikar a registered nurse, my family settled Eastern Oregon and Washington as pioneers and continue to run a century farm in the Walla Walla valley. Today, I am here representing the Oregon Nurses Association. ONA is a nurses union and professional association representing over 15,000 health care workers and providers, including registered nurses, advanced practice nurses, and allied health workers. Our members work in urban and rural hospitals, clinics, school-based health centers, home health, and county health departments across Oregon. ONA advocates for our profession and quality healthcare, but a critical part of our mission is advocating for healthy communities. ONA is here today because the food system should be health promoting, sustainable and just, a stance consistent with the American Nurses Association, of which we are a local affiliate.

As a science based profession, nurses firmly believe that research and data need to guide decisions. This includes the decisions on how we are going to plan for the future, and understand how these plans will impact ongoing problems, such as particulate pollution in the air and nitrate pollution in ground water.

Senate Bill 85 focuses on deepening our understanding of Confined Animal Feeding Operations, or CAFOs. The data related to CAFOs at this time is nothing short of concerning. For example, studies have already demonstrated that air pollutants from CAFOs cause significant respiratory illnesses for the workers. In Umatilla County alone, CAFOs are the leading contributors to groundwater nitrate pollution.

We are also concerned with the disparate impact of Confined Animal Feeding Operations especially on Latinx and rural communities. These pollutants not only disproportionately affect individual CAFO workers, but also their families and neighbors who live in the surrounding communities, for example the Walla Walla valley and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, communities where members of my family live.

Oregon needs a food system that is more health promoting, sustainable and just. Ideally, a health promoting food system would not only produce healthy foods, but also support the health of farmers, farm workers and residents in surrounding communities. It should address the public health impacts across the entire lifecycle of food including how it is consumed as well as how it is produced. A sustainable food system meets our current food and nutrition needs without compromising the ability of the system to meet the needs of future generations.

We support Senate Bill 85 which states there will be no new industrial confined feeding operations or expansion of existing CAFOs while research is being conducted. We join the coalition of voices taking this stance. We expect this process will result in a food system that is better for all Oregon by being health promoting, sustainable and just.

Thank you.