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On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Natural Resources

Measure: SB85

I am providing this testimony due to my personal experiences in rural California over 30 years ago and a deep respect for the natural resources, environment and quality of life provided by the Willamette Valley. Our family tree includes some of the original homesteading families in the Willamette Valley and one of the first judges in southern Oregon territory. It is my hope that Oregon does not have to repeat the hard lessons already learned in CAFO friendly states like California.

My experience with the highly concentrated toxic levels of ammonia output by CAFOs in California is not about toxically foul air or the reduction in fish populations (both are bad enough) but the life and health of families and children.

My wife, Jody, and I moved to the city of Turlock, CA with our young son of four where we enrolled in the California State Stanislaus University.

We decided to rent a farmhouse near the University.

Jody decided to have our well water checked by the local water department. Our well was red tagged for having high levels of bacteria. We were given instructions to clean the well with chlorine.

We could not get a clear answer as to why there were high levels of bacteria. We later learned this area was surrounded by a number of CAFO facilities and liquid ammonia fertilizer, produced as a waste bi-product of the CAFOs, was heavy used on nearly all the surrounding crops. It was sold as a cheap "bonus" output to the surrounding farms.

We called the water department and asked if we could boil some of the water to drink while the well was being decontaminated. The reply was shocking and likely changed our lives. The official started by saying he would not give his name nor should we call back to confirm the information he was going to tell us because he would lose his job.

He told us that we could not drink the water due to extremely high levels of nitrates and nitrite salts from liquid ammonia fertilization and there was no way to clean the water. He went on to say that if our child did drink the water he could be severely brain damaged.

We had a hard time believing a governmental agency was misleading the public on something so serious.

We needed to confirm this for ourselves and we went to an old Portuguese farmer across the road who had been raising cattle most his life but his farm was now failing. We asked about his cattle and water. He told us that the cattle were not getting pregnant and any calves were being aborted or born malformed. He suspected the water, however a number of neighboring farmers tried to convince him he was at fault.

We talked to other farmers and found that some of them knew it and others didn't or would not admit it. Many of the farms were locked into using the cheap ammonia fertilizer through bank loans, contracts and quotas. Around this time there happened to be graffiti on the town's water tower which read "IT'S THE WATER".

We found out through an environmental impact study on nitrates and nitrites in the water table - the contamination was so extensive it was irreversible. Furthermore there was no filtration or remedial systems that could remove the such huge amount of nitrates and nitrites. The contamination was so deep that city wells were having to be dug deeper.

Chicken manure has one of the highest concentrations of nitrates and nitrites of any domesticated animal. Such high concentration produces a free radical acid that is unfilterable in the air, in the water and in the ground.

We got lucky with our son, but later lawsuits were filed on behalf of the farm workers in Delano California, because their children were being born with brain damage and other abnormalities due to the high concentrations of nitrates and nitrites salts in the drinking water.

If you allow gigantic agro business be prioritized over the health of small Oregon farming communities with unstainable practices like CAFOs, the story I and others have personally experienced will repeat itself.