



February 8, 2024

Chair Helm and Members of the Committee,

Tillamook County Creamery Association (TCCA) is a 115-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 be good neighbors and stewards by protecting land and preserving water as their livelihoods depend on the resources they use. We're dedicated to continually improving agricultural practices, leveraging everything from scientific and technological breakthroughs to our farmers' intergenerational knowledge about the land. Our commitment to enduring ecosystems extends from our farms to facilities and throughout our supply chain.

TCCA supports House Bill 4061, which would establish the Elk Damage Prevention and Compensation Pilot Program. We commend the efforts to address the pressing issue of elk damage to agricultural lands, fences, and livestock feed, which has been a growing concern for our members.

For over two decades, the elk population in Tillamook has presented significant challenges to our farming community. Producers have reported extensive damage to fences, gates, and crops, which not only leads to financial losses but also poses potential health risks to dairy herds due to disease transmission. The elk's appetite for grass, a primary component of dairy cow feed, further exacerbates the problem by limiting pasture harvest. We have received firsthand accounts from several producers who have decided not to grow corn, as elk can easily cause irreparable harm to stalks by bedding down, or by simply running through fields. Feed costs are the largest expense for dairy producers and have risen by more than 20 percent in just the last three years. Any impact to locally grown feed, like low yields from crop damage, results in outside sourcing at a higher price.

The proposed bill is a crucial step in addressing these challenges. Our members take advantage of ODFW's Oregon Landowner Damage Program. However, there is only so



much a tag will do, and depredating elk does not necessarily lead to deterrence. By creating a program to award economic damages for crop loss and infrastructure damage, farmers will have the opportunity to recoup costs and potentially upgrade fencing and infrastructure to avoid further damage.

Thank you for your attention to this issue. We look forward to the successful passage of this bill and the positive impact it will have on our agricultural communities.

Sincerely,

Trevor Beltz

Manager, Government Relations & Public Affairs