

Submitter: Diane Choplin
On Behalf Of: Self and Fellow Farmers
Committee: House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2979

Dear Co-Chair Helm, Co-Chair Owens, and members of the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Wildfire:

Thank you for your time and attention. I own and operate Bel Avenir Farm in Ashland, Oregon where I've been raising rotationally-grazed lamb and pastured eggs for direct sale for thirteen years.

In 2020 the Almeda Fire, which claimed 3,000 homes and businesses in Southern Oregon, burned within 500 feet of my farm. As flames crested the hill separating our rural neighborhood from town, I frantically called friends with livestock trailers to help me evacuate my flocks. Two attempted the trip, but flames and traffic jams prevented them from reaching my farm. So, I created a paddock in what I felt was the safest area and fled with my son and our dog. Our neighborhood was under evacuation order for the entire week that the power was also down. Linemen worked 24/7, their spotlights illuminating the night sky as embers glowed on the ground. When the winds died down, smoke settled thickly over our valley. All day, for seven days, I moved water by hand from Myer Creek and our pond, using 5-gallon bucket and a borrowed gas pump and firehose, to replenish livestock tanks, wet firewood, and hydrate pasture around the animals.

In 2021 and 2022, our region was hit with catastrophic drought. Ponds, creeks, and wells in our neighborhood dried up. Clay soils cracked creating fissures deeper than my arm that crisscrossed pastures.

Had we been in drought during the Almeda fire, we would have had no way to fight the flames in our rural neighborhood. Fire stations prioritize high density areas in such cases, not our rural neighborhood. In the case of another Almeda, you're on your own warned our local fire chief when I asked him to tour my farm and help me come up with a plan for greater resilience. Given the stalled traffic, he added that our best evacuation spot was the same area I'd left my animals. Even better if I could keep water in my pond.

In 2024 I received a Farmer and Rancher Disaster Resilience grant for 19K to line my pond and procure and install a 2,500-gallon water tank and gas-powered generator that could start and run both my well pump and irrigation pump. For 15 years I've been managing for fuel reduction (eliminating blackberries, cleaning up storm fall, limbing up trees), but without the infrastructure, my efforts would never be enough to

be fire and drought resilient. And without the grant I would have never been able to afford the infrastructure.

Please support HB 2979, renewing funding for this valuable program. Small producers do not live extravagantly. Most barely make it financially from year to year. This grant helps us become more resilient to disasters coming with greater force and frequency.

Thank you,
Diane Choplin
Bel Avenir Farm
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