



Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire

February 4, 2025

Oregon Farm Bureau OPPOSES SB 747

Oregon Farm Bureau (“OFB”) is the state’s most inclusive general agriculture organization, proudly representing over 6,600 family farms and ranches that produce more than 250 agricultural commodities. From hops and hazelnuts to cattle, cane berries, and timber, our members encompass all farming methods, including organic, conventional, biotech, and no-tech.

OFB strongly opposes the costly mandate in Senate Bill 747. This bill is a deeply flawed and expensive proposal that reflects a lack of understanding of crop nutrition science and groundwater impacts.

SB 747 makes family farmers out to be “boogeymen,” relying on assumptions instead of engaging producers and experts in a dialogue about the agricultural practices in question. The bill assumes that farm and ranch families haphazardly apply inputs to their land with no understanding of agronomics. In actuality, production-scale agriculture is sophisticated; it has to be because margins in this industry are so thin. Fertilizer application is a science, guided by research, soil testing, consultation with agronomists, and careful management. All of these steps are taken to maximize yields and minimize inputs, ensuring the sustainability of the farm and landscape for the next generation.

Fertilizer is also an expensive crop input, and costs have soared over the last few years. There is no incentive for farmers to over-apply fertilizers, as SB 747 implies. The last five years have been incredibly challenging across nearly every commodity grown in Oregon. USDA data from the last agricultural census reveals that 69% of Oregon farms saw a net cash loss in 2022, and net cash income per farm was an average of 67% lower for Oregon farms compared to the national average. Given these dire economic statistics, efficacy is critical! Efficient use of inputs is part of the ethos of managing land, and producers have made substantial investments in precision technology that reflects that value (i.e. drones, GPS-tractors, smartphone-controlled irrigation, and sophisticated sprayers). **Farmers and ranchers are frequently early adopters of technology to produce more with less—less water, less fertilizer, fewer pesticides, and less fuel.**

Yet, SB 747 ignores the science behind production agriculture as well as decades of collaboration between regulators and the regulated community. Oregon’s existing

agricultural water quality program has long been a partnership between the Oregon Department of Agriculture (“ODA”) and producers. Since its inception in 1993, ODA’s Agricultural Water Quality Program (“Program”) has worked to ensure that water quality standards are being met on Oregon’s agricultural operations. Compliance with the regulations within the program is required by law, but ODA’s efforts provide landowners with flexibility to achieve the required outcomes in ways suitable for their individual farm or ranch. The Program prioritizes work in these three areas: (1) streamside vegetation, (2) erosion control, and (3) manure and nutrients. It is implemented across 38 watershed-based areas in Oregon. Managing nutrients and water quality is not a novel concept for Oregon’s family farms and ranches. Producers have long been engaged in management efforts alongside the ODA.

OFB is further concerned about the scope and application of this proposal. **SB 747’s focus on 200 acres is not only arbitrary, but it lacks scientific basis.** Fertilizer application is not a one-size-fits-all equation for the diversity of crops that Oregon producers grow. Crop needs vary widely based on soil type, crop and crop rotation, weather patterns, and a variety of other factors. Simply tracking application rates for crops grown on farms of a certain size does not equate to identifying overuse, nor does it account for the complex variables influencing crop nutrition needs and nutrient uptake. And the “data” collected certainly should not be used to penalize working families.

Our members are left wondering why SB 747 punishes producers in every corner of the state for legacy issues in one region of Oregon. The bill mandates one-size-fits-all fertilizer reporting in order to identify farm families who are believed to be overapplying fertilizer and penalize them. It is disappointing that the bill’s sponsors failed to contact anyone representing commercial agricultural production prior to introducing this flawed concept. Had there been dialogue with stakeholders, policymakers would have realized the glaring disconnect between the SB 747’s stated goals and how it proposes to achieve them. In the absence of engagement with farm groups, SB 747 instead proposes a “fishing expedition” that will do nothing to improve water quality but will punish and harm the farm and ranch families who have operated in Oregon for generations.

This issue warrants a thorough, collaborative discussion with producers, agronomists, and industry experts at the helm—individuals who work directly with crop and soil health and nutrient management. **Instead, SB 747 appears to have been crafted with no working knowledge of agriculture, resulting in an expensive policy proposal that misses the mark on both crop production and groundwater dynamics.**

OFB urges the Committee to reject this misguided proposal and engage in meaningful discussions with producers who manage their lands sustainably for the next generation.

Please support farm and ranch families by voting “no” on SB 747.