

Subject: Testimony Regarding SB779 Support the operation of the AgriStress Helpline in Oregon

To the Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Early Childhood and Behavioral Health

My name is Gabrielle Molinari Homer, and I am the current Oregon CattleWomen Association President-Elect residing in Fossil, Oregon. I am writing to respectfully submit my testimony regarding SB779 Support the operation of the AgriStress Helpline in Oregon

In 1988 as part of an Organizational Psychology class at Oregon State University I presented a paper on the stress of careers in Agriculture. At that time, I had NO idea I would later find myself in an agriculture field, presently the CFO of Painted Hills Natural Beef located in Fossil, Oregon, as well as the President-Elect of the Oregon CattleWomen Association.

At the time I drafted the paper, I focused on a number of factors inherent in agricultural occupations that are outside the control of the individual including weather, input prices (fuel, supplies, seed, stock, fertilizer, etc), output/market prices for finished goods, and every changing regulatory standards. Since then, we pile on constantly changing market conditions and public perceptions driven by issues such as global warming, endangered species issues, water issues, labor issue, supply chain issues, taxation issues, family succession issues, the list goes on and on. I think if I were to write the paper again, it would be four times the length and still only brush the surface.

Given that the cultural norms in agricultural fields have historically focused on independence, resilience, stoicism and durability, it is not common for farmers, ranchers and agricultural laborers to reach out for help. As the stressors have multiplied, it seems of every growing importance that we provide adequate mental and emotional resources to support these hardworking individuals that are striving to efficiently feed and provide necessary resources to our communities.

When I met Allison Myers and learned of the AgriStress Helpline, I was so grateful to know that someone acknowledged the issues of stress and mental health in agriculture and our mandate as a caring and empathetic society to support agricultural producers. When I heard that they had been contacted by producers in a majority of Oregon Counties, I knew this was a universally needed support system. We live and work in Wheeler County, the least populated county in the state, with no direct access to mental health services. The AgriStress Helpline is a vital link for our producers for help in times of crisis. These folks are the “salt of the earth” and as a society we owe them our support.

For these, and many reasons (in the interest of brevity I touched on just a few) I urge the committee to consider the importance of mental health support to our agricultural community state-wide and the need to secure stable and on-going financial support for the program.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Gabrielle Homer
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