



27 February 2025

House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

Representative Ken Helm, Co-Chair
Representative Mark Owens, Co-Chair
Representative Sarah McDonald, Vice Chair
Representative Court Boice, Member
Representative Annessa Hartman, Member
Representative Bobby Levy, Member
Representative Pam Marsh, Member
Representative Susan McLain
Representative Anna Scharf, Member

900 Court Street NE, Salem OR 97301

Subject: HB 2965: testimony in opposition

Dear Representatives,

My name is Randy Bentz. I am the president of the Oregon Aquaculture Association and the part-owner and operator of the Blue Den Fish Hatchery, a small family-owned trout farm east of Scio, OR. Our trout farm has been in business for 60 years, since 1965, selling live rainbow trout for stocking in private ponds across the state. I rise in opposition to HB 2965 and its amendments because it is unnecessary legislation that solves no current problem, but rather hinders future innovation and opportunities in Oregon aquaculture while providing no actual benefits to the state or its natural resources.

The Oregon Aquaculture Association's mission is to promote aquatic animal and plant production and education to further expand the availability and knowledge of sustainably raised, healthy, and nutritious consumer products in Oregon, while conserving our natural resources.

Aquaculture represents the fastest growing segment of food production worldwide. Global demand for seafood products has been increasing at a rate greater than wild stocks can meet. The United States imports over \$20 billion of seafood products every year. Of these imports, over half are farm-raised in some other part of the world. This means that Americans, rather than buying locally farmed products, are buying products raised on foreign farms over which we have no oversight or even visibility. The reality of \$20+ billion of foreign imports also puts to rest the assertion that Oregon aquaculture products would undercut the wild-harvest business. American demand for seafood obviously exceeds local supply, so there is plenty of room on the table for both farmed and wild-caught fish.

Oregon fin-fish aquaculture, as an industry, is practically non-existent. When my father founded the Blue Den Fish Hatchery in 1965, there were approximately 40-50 small trout hatcheries throughout the state, each producing a small number of fish for a local

customer base. Today, that number has decreased to 5 trout producers in the state, along with 2 hatcheries that grow warm water fish and one sturgeon producer that sells directly to the food and by-product market. Of the 5 trout producers, only one can be considered commercial scale (i.e., produces enough income to employ additional workers.) The others, including our hatchery, are essentially sole proprietorships. While this is a reason for concern, I see it as an opportunity for expansion, diversification, and innovation. We are not burdened by the sunk cost of aging infrastructure, because there is no real infrastructure. We have an opportunity to grow a new segment of the agriculture industry using the best of new practices, technologies, and ideas. The arbitrary banning of a specific type of technology (net pens, for example,) Places unnecessary restrictions on future growth.

HB 2965 seeks to ban net pen aquaculture systems in coastal Oregon. This is unnecessary, because there are no estuaries or rivers on the Oregon coast that are suitable for net pens. In addition, net pens are a type of technology, and the single greatest truth about technology is that it always changes. It would be a great shame if, at some point in the future, an innovative entrepreneur proposed a promising idea for raising food fish in a river (involving some form of safe, cost-effective, and environmentally-friendly net containment,) only to be stopped in its tracks due to some arbitrary law passed years before.

We in the aquaculture community are not opposed to regulation. In its most ideal form, regulation is merely the codification of best practices that can assist entrepreneurs in doing things the right way. We do, however, oppose laws and regulations that restrict development or impose costs (both time and monetary) without any real benefit – this is HB 2965 in a nutshell.

I encourage you to reject this bill and I thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Randy Bentz

President, Oregon Aquaculture Association
Owner/Operator, Blue Den Fish Hatchery