

Submitter: Butch Whitaker
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Labor and Business
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB999

Please support SB 999 and the -1 amendment. This bill will ensure that family farms and ranches are able to continue providing affordable housing options to our employees without risk of enforcement and penalties from OR-OSHA.

Housing on or near the farm can provide a valuable benefit for employees. Many farms are in rural areas where housing options can be scarce and expensive. Allowing an employee to rent a house located on the farm or ranch helps reduce the burden for finding housing, avoids longer commutes and can provide a housing option that is lower cost than rental units in the community.

Most of this housing is not provided to workers as a condition of employment but does benefit workers in many ways. These homes are often leased to permanent employees, a foreman, and their families, as opposed to temporary labor camps that are sometimes provided to seasonal workers and registered with OR-OSHA.

OR-OSHA's rules treat workers' private homes as worksites and would require employers to manage these homes round-the-clock, in line with OR-OSHA's January 2025 farmworker camp rules, to avoid penalties. OR-OSHA's application of its authority is not at all in line with federal OSHA, which specifically regulates temporary labor camps provided as a condition of employment. It is not reasonable to regulate workers' private houses as a worksite.

Employers want to continue to support our employees this way, but we will not be able to if OR-OSHA can enforce its costly farmworker camp rules in single-family rental homes. Growers cannot afford to take on any more liability right now. Our margins are down across the board, and we cannot risk enforcement action by OR-OSHA.

The amendment to SB 999 provides clarity that OR-OSHA's authority to enforce its farmworker camp rules applies to registered farmworker camps and not to single-family homes that are rented to employees. This would bring OR-OSHA's enforcement authority closer in line with federal authority over temporary labor camps.

Please vote yes on SB 999 with the amendment. Family farms want to be able to continue to provide affordable, single-family homes to employees without the risk of penalties from OR-OSHA. This bill is really important to allow that to continue.

