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RE: Memorandum of Support on SB 80

Relating to water quality permits for confined animal feeding operations; declaring an emergency

Dear Chair Golden, Vice Chair Nash, and members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire,

On behalf of the Animal Legal Defense Fund—the nation’s preeminent legal advocacy organization for animals—and our thousands of supporters in Oregon, I submit this memo in strong support of Senate Bill 80, a bill to prohibit the Department of Environmental Quality from issuing a water quality permit to certain confined animal feeding operations located in a ground water management area (GWMA). Large-scale confined animal feeding operations, or CAFOs, have devastating effects on communities, the environment, and animals. We strongly support this common-sense measure to stop the ongoing nitrate pollution occurring in the state’s three already overburdened GWMAs and urge the committee to pass this measure.

Factory farms harm people, the environment, and animals.

The Lower Umatilla Basin GWMA is facing a severe public health crisis due to significant nitrate pollution and the other two, the Southern Willamette Valley GWMA and the Northern Malheur County GWMA, continue to have unsafe levels of nitrates in the groundwater in large part due to the large CAFOs in the area. Drinking nitrate-laden water can lead to serious health problems. Nitrate contamination has been linked to thyroid issues and numerous types of cancer. The negative impacts of nitrate contamination are especially harmful to infants and pregnant women and have been associated with blue baby syndrome, a potentially fatal condition that can deprive infants of oxygen.

In addition to polluting drinking water, factory farms and their manure lagoons emit toxic air pollutants including ammonia, hydrogen sulfide, and particulate matter, all of which can lead to adverse respiratory symptoms. Factory farms also use large amounts of water, resulting in the depletion of aquifers and increased contamination of groundwater.

Animals that live on factory farms suffer immensely throughout their short lives and are not treated in the humane manner that Oregon consumers expect. Rather than living freely on the rolling green hills depicted in many companies’ websites, cows raised for milk spend most of their lives indoors in concrete buildings with no access to pasture. They are repeatedly artificially impregnated and have their calves ripped from them shortly after birth to stimulate milk production, and are continuously confined and milked by robotic carousels. Cows’ bodies are not designed to stand on hard surfaces, resulting in foot damage and lameness. Once they are no longer productive, usually at just a quarter of cow’s natural lifespan because of the constant stress their bodies undergo, they are sent to slaughter. Calves that are taken away from their mothers, mere moments after birth, are placed alone in hutches so that they cannot nurse and take any of the company’s product. Male calves raised for veal are slaughtered at just a few months old.

Cows raised for meat are bred to grow as fast as possible. They spend about a third of their lives on feedlots, where they are packed into barren, crowded pens, with no grass to graze, and forced to stand in their own feces while being forced to pack on close to 1000 pounds in a 6-month period. They are sent to slaughter before they reach 2 years old, despite having a natural lifespan of 20-25 years.

Egg-laying hens and broiler chickens are kept in over-crowded, ammonia-filled indoor buildings. They often have no access to the outside and very little room to roam because of how many birds are kept together. The ammonia from their feces can damage chickens’ eyes and respiratory systems and can cause painful burns all over their bodies. Broiler chickens are forced to put on a rapid amount of weight in an incredibly short amount of time, sometimes only 6 weeks, to the point that they often cannot even hold themselves up. Broiler chickens never make it to adulthood, despite having a natural lifespan of over 6 years. These are not the images that most Oregon consumers imagine when they think of farms in this beautiful state.

All our clients are innocent

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This bill is designed to stop the worst offenders, **large CAFOs unsustainably housing thousands to millions of animals**, *it does not apply to small family farms that are trying to compete with large-scale operations and historically are much better stewards of their land and animals.*

The current framework is insufficient to stop the further degradation of the three GWMA.

SB 80 would prohibit the construction of new, or expansion of existing, large CAFOs in the state's three GWMA. These GWMA were designated due to high levels of nitrate pollution from irresponsible industry practices, yet there is no mechanism in place to stop new sources of pollution from large CAFOs. SB 85, passed in 2023, was a good first step in addressing these issues, but more needs to be done to restore integrity to these lands and the people that live there. Further regulations are simply insufficient to bring the GWMA under control. The evidence is clear that factory farms are significant contributors to nitrate pollution, yet the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) just last year approved an NPDES permit for J-S Farms in Linn County to factory farm millions of broiler chickens, in violation of SB 85. This came despite significant opposition from neighboring residents, local farmers, and concerned citizens from across the state. Further legislation is needed to fill in the gaps left by SB 85 and current regulations and stop the spread of large CAFOs, particularly in vulnerable areas.

The devastating impacts of factory farming can be clearly seen by visiting the Lower Umatilla Basin GWMA, or talking to the people that live there. This unsustainable practice and the harms caused are at odds with the values that the people of Oregon hold dear. I respectfully urge this committee to pass this common-sense bill. Thank you for your time and consideration of this important measure.

Sincerely,



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