

March 8, 2017

Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301
senr.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov

Submitted via email

RE: Columbia Riverkeeper Written Testimony on SB 197, Dairy Air Quality Bill.

Dear Chairman Dembrow and Committee Members:

Food & Water Watch is a national organization that champions safe food and clean water for all. We have approximately 30,000 members and supporters in Oregon. On behalf of these members, we urge you to pass SB 197 out of committee with a 'do pass' recommendation.

In late February, 28 doctors and public health professionals submitted a letter to the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee in support of SB 197, to create a long-overdue Oregon Dairy Air Emissions program. The legislature directed the departments of agriculture and environmental quality to act on this important issue nearly ten years ago, through 2008 legislation that led to the creation of 2008 Oregon Dairy Air Quality Task Force. The Task Force made clear, consensus recommendations to tackle dairy pollution that same year, but the agencies have not acted. In the meantime, Oregon's agricultural landscape has continued to shift away from small and midsized dairies and towards mega-dairies, and along with this shift the public health threats from mega-dairy air pollution have continued to grow. As a result, health experts recognize that further legislative action is now needed.

As these health professionals noted in their letter, there is strong evidence that large-scale, industrial livestock confinement operations can generate dangerous amounts of air contaminants that are harmful to public health. The emissions at issue include ammonia and hydrogen sulfide, which cause a long list of respiratory symptoms. Ammonia contributes to the formation of fine particles associated with heart disease and the regional haze obstructing views of the Columbia Gorge and other scenic areas. Hydrogen sulfide is a dangerous neurotoxin that can reach fatal levels at industrial livestock operations and can threaten entire communities. In fact, a 1,500-cow dairy CAFO in Minnesota released so much hydrogen sulfide gas in 2008 that the state evacuated nearby residents and declared the dairy a public health hazard.

Oregon currently faces construction of a massive, 30,000-head dairy – the proposed Lost Valley Ranch – which intends to operate near the existing 70,000-head Threemile Canyon Farms dairy. These will be two of the largest mega-dairies in the country. Clearly, the dairy industry views Oregon as a favorable place to operate. The time to act is now, before the state is further inundated with new sources of agricultural air pollution without a plan to mitigate these harmful effects. A failure to address this regulatory gap could lead to an influx of factory farms that will ensure Oregon becomes a “manure magnet,” producing cheap dairy products for export while keeping the waste and air pollution. This is simply reckless from the perspective of public health.

Senate Bill 197 is a necessary step in the right direction for Oregon's public health, family farms, and environment, and Food & Water Watch asks that you pass it out of committee. Thank you for considering our input.

Sincerely,

Julia DeGraw
Senior Organizer
Food & Water Watch