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Animals Shouldn’t Be Able to Sue Owners says Farm Bureau

Oregon Farm Bureau issues statement on Justice the horse’s lawsuit against its former owner.

SALEM, OREGON, Nov. 14, 2019 — Last week, the Oregon Farm Bureau, Oregon Cattlemen’s Association, and Oregon Dairy Farmers Association partnered to draft a friend of the court brief on precedent setting litigation pending in the Oregon Court of Appeals. The case squarely addresses whether a horse has a right to sue his owner in court for damages relating to the horse’s neglect. The case, Justice, an American Quarter Horse v. Gwendolyn Vercher, is an attempt by the Animal Legal Defense Fund to set precedent in Oregon that animals have legal personhood, including the right to sue humans in court. This case could open the door to expansive and significant litigation regarding the ability to own and manage livestock, produce meat or dairy products, participate in rodeos or FFA, and even have working dogs. It could even subject pet owners to private rights of action and allow activist groups to bring lawsuits under the guise of animals seeking to vindicate nonexistent rights.

If successful, this case puts the livestock industry and rural Oregon at risk. Moreover, Oregon would become the first state in the country to grant animals legal personhood, which would have a profound impact on our society and legal system. Our organizations got involved to ensure that the Court understands the history and context of Oregon’s animal welfare statutes and to ensure the Court understands the expansive, far reaching implications of this case for the livestock industry.

To be clear, the facts of this case were abhorrent, and the defendant was rightfully prosecuted for the neglect of her horse. However, Oregon law already has severe consequences for those who abuse and neglect animals and there is a mechanism for those who rescue neglected animals to be compensated for their care. But these legitimate concerns are not what this case is about. This case is simply an effort by animals rights activists to pull the ultimate thread in a longstanding effort to unravel and halt livestock operations in Oregon. We will continue to stand strong to protect the livestock industry from the significant precedent set by this case.

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Oregon Farm Bureau (OFB) is a grassroots, nonpartisan, nonprofit, general farm organization representing the interests of farming and ranching families in the public and policymaking arenas. First established in Oregon at the county level in 1919 and the state level in 1932, Farm Bureau is organized in all 36 counties.

Oregon Farm Bureau President Sharon Waterman is an OFB Hall of Fame honoree and operates a Century Ranch raising sheep, cattle, and timber in Bandon. She is OFB’s 16th president.