FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 11, 2020

Contacts: OFB’s Anne Marie Moss, annemarie@oregonfb.org, 503.399.1701
Brenda Frketich, brenda@kirschfamilyfarms.com, 503.508.3726, Nuttygrass.com

Farm Bureau member exposes baseless anti-pesticide letter submitted as legislative testimony

“My Journey to Find 98 Chlorpyrifos Alternatives; The Unexpected Rabbit Hole,” a blog post on Nuttygrass.com, details a farmer’s investigation into an unfounded letter opposing chlorpyrifos — and the frustrating realization that it was considered more trustworthy to some lawmakers than her lifelong experience in agriculture.

One of the bills Oregon Farm Bureau opposed during the 2020 Oregon Legislative Session was House Bill 4109, a bill that aimed to outlaw chlorpyrifos, an insecticide used to protect certain specialty crops from bug infestations.

During a public hearing on HB 4109 before the Senate Environment Committee, Marion County Farm Bureau member and full-time farmer Brenda Frketich testified against the bill and explained how a ban on chlorpyrifos would impact her family farm and many others in the Willamette Valley, in large part because there are no alternatives available.

In response, a legislator asked Frketich about a “letter” submitted as online testimony that claimed there were “98 safer insecticides” that could be used in place of chlorpyrifos. This letter had “47 different signers, academics, scientists, from multiple universities here in Oregon,” he said. The letter was referred to in other committee hearings and was the basis of at least one legislator’s decision to vote in favor of HB 4109.

“While I’m used to the back-and-forth and ‘he said, she said’ that is typical of a public hearing on legislation, this time it didn’t sit right with me. I felt as though my integrity and that of my industry were being called into question,” Frketich writes on her blog Nuttygrass.com.

So Frketich decided to get to the bottom of this mysterious letter and the alleged 98 safer alternatives to chlorpyrifos, of which she as a full-time farmer was completely unaware.

This sets the stage for her blog post, “My Journey to Find 98 Chlorpyrifos Alternatives; The Unexpected Rabbit Hole” at Nuttygrass.com published on March 9.
“I’ll be honest that when this whole thing started, I imagined myself pouring over 98 labels of insecticides – cataloging mode of actions, pests controlled, pests partially controlled, how they would work into our cropping system, etc. I almost wish that was where this journey landed me. Instead, I ended up down a rabbit hole of zero accountability for what is submitted as testimony by a registered lobbyist. Where I landed is frustrating, because I take a lot of pride in what I put my name behind, and I was under the (apparently false) assumption that others did too,” writes Frketich.

Frketich’s story is worth the read. It’s a story about the legislative process, who’s considered trustworthy on agriculture-related issues, and a farmer’s passion to fight for her livelihood.

Writes Frketich, “I didn’t write this to argue the pluses and minuses of having the tool chlorpyrifos. I am writing this because I hope it comes across how frustrated I am. If we are at a place in Oregon where people can just submit whatever they wish without data to back it up, then farmers in Oregon are sunk. If integrity doesn’t matter, then what happened this session will occur in sessions following the 2020 short session. And I fear that someday this mentality — and the ability to put forward false information as truth — will cost my family our farm.”

Oregon Farm Bureau thanks Frketich for digging deeper into the anti-pesticide lobby’s claims about alternatives to chlorpyrifos during the 2020 legislative session. We hope the state legislature is as concerned about this misleading communication as we are and will take steps to ensure the integrity of the legislative process.

###

* Note to Editors: “Farm Bureau” is a registered trademark; please capitalize in all cases.

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 Barb Iverson comes from a multigenerational family farm from Woodburn, raising industrial hemp, grass seed, squash, vetch seed, hazelnuts, wine and table grapes, and operating the Wooden Shoe Tulip Festival, which attracts over 160,000 visitors each year. Iverson is OFB’s 17th president.