FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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OFB Statement on Protections for Farmworkers

September 28, 2020, SALEM, Oregon: The COVID-19 pandemic and devastating wildfires have put unprecedented strain on Oregon’s agricultural communities. Yet when tragedy strikes, farming cannot stop. Farmers and their employees must work alongside each other during harvest to keep grocery stores filled and food on our tables—something none of us should take for granted.

Recognizing the importance of keeping farms and ranches safe during this trying time, OR-OSHA has expanded its requirements for in-field sanitation, employer-provided transportation, and on-farm housing. With needed support from the state, Oregon’s farms have made millions of dollars in upgrades this season to reduce the spread of COVID-19 on farm and in our communities. In tandem, the OR-OSHA has increased its on-farm inspections and has created a regulatory emphasis program to give heightened attention and consultation to food processors and agricultural businesses. With over 11,000 complaints filed with OR-OSHA since the start of the pandemic, agricultural operations have made up less than 3% of those complaints and only a handful of those actually resulted in any type of enforcement activity.[1]

This goes to show that our system is working—through consultation and education by OR-OSHA, Oregon’s farmers and farmworkers are getting through harvest while keeping their operations safe during COVID-19.

Despite the data collected by OR-OSHA, a misinformed narrative persists that agricultural workers have been left unprotected and unsupported by both their employers and the state during COVID-19 and the wildfires. As mentioned above, farmers have taken COVID-19 protections seriously. Farmers work side-by-side with their employees and ensure that every precaution is taken to keep everyone safe. Moreover, farmers and ranchers were on the front lines when the historically destructive wildfires took place, evacuating and caring for their neighbors, animals, and rural communities. Farmers in Southern Oregon have even set up funds to provide long-term financial recovery for agricultural employees who lost their homes and have provided emergency housing for their employees. The notion that Oregon’s farmers do not care about the health and wellbeing of their employees is simply untrue.

While we take issue with methodology, sample size, and lack of employer representation in the COVID-19 Farmworker Study, as well as the misinformed narrative espoused by union advocates who have little to no knowledge of farming and ranching, Oregon Farm Bureau’s focus remains on how we can continue to come together to support everyone, both employers...
and employees, in our agricultural communities. We agree that we need more tools to provide education to farmworkers in a number of languages. Although most resources are available in English and Spanish, there needs to be access to educational materials for workers who speak indigenous or other languages. We also adamantly agree that mental health awareness in our rural communities is deeply important. Between the pandemic, wildfires, and steep economic downturn, our farmers, ranchers, and farm employees are facing an enormous amount of stress. This issue has been of immense importance for the Oregon Farm Bureau over the last year, which is why we began our Rural Resilience campaign: Oregonfb.org/ruralresilience. Farm and ranch families are partners in resolving these needs for all members of our rural communities.

We sincerely hope that through collaboration and a shared commitment to protecting rural communities, Oregon agriculture can be celebrated and supported, not vilified. It is in the best interests of all Oregonians if we choose to put politics aside and grow together, not apart.


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* 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.