



RE: HB 1395

Date: Feb. 5, 2021

To: House Rural and Agriculture Committee

Dear Committee Members,

This correspondence is from the Yakima County Farm Bureau (YCFB). YCFB is a grass roots organization with 2700 members consisting of farmers and ranchers with operations both large and small as well as other folks with interest in agriculture affairs in Yakima **and Klickitat Counties.**

Our Farm Bureau celebrates ALL farmers of ALL ethnicities and we believe that diversity is important in farming. The Yakima County has a great number of Latino/Hispanic and Pacific ancestral line-aged farmers amongst it ranks.

However, the YCFB believes that HB 1395 (though of good intent) is a poor attempt to help encourage more under-represented citizens to become farmers and ranchers. The number one and number two constraints to become or to continue to be a farmer are economics and over regulation. Without solutions to the structural impediments to recruitment for all people desiring to enter into farming, no legislation will succeed. The YCFB also notes (oddly) that HB 1395 fails to acknowledge women as under-represented in farming since they constitute more than half of the population, yet are a small percentage of lead owner/operators.

The YCFB believes that no person can scale the learning curve required to succeed in agriculture without an extensive exposure to a farm or ranch but regulations that prevent youth from working on a farm and beginning to acquaint themselves about farming and ranching has been legislated out of existence in Washington State (unless you are an immediate family member).

Young people seek degrees in Agriculture but not to become farmers and ranchers. The lack of an economic stimulus to farm or ranch as opposed to working in related supporting roles and make much greater salaries and wages with more predictable hours of work draw young people away from the desire to become a farmer. Add to that the unpredictable nature and outright struggle with government excessive regulation and the disincentive becomes insurmountable.

There is a long standing trend in our country that farmers and ranchers are not being replaced at the same rate that aging ones are retiring. The average age of a farmer or rancher is currently 59. In the United States today there are about 2 million commercial farms feeding more than 332 million people. This trend shows no sign of turning around and the YCFB believes that it constitutes a threat to our food security.

The Washington State Farm Bureau (WSFB) is directly responsible for a long standing program that fosters youth to share an interest in agriculture, the Young Farmers and Ranchers (YF&R). Other programs that also encourage youth to consider agriculture are the Future Farmers Of America (FFA) and 4H. Furthermore, the WSFB and the various County Farm Bureaus assist and help fund a robust scholarship program that assists prospective students interested in agriculture. Also, the WSFB supports a group that is a subset called "Women in Agriculture".

Collectively, these activities assist and enhance the next generation of farmers and ranchers so that they may be inclined to and able to accept the great responsibility of producing the food to sustain our great nation as well as many other countries in the future.

Rather than adopting a legislative bill such as HB 1395 that the YCFB believes will accomplish little if anything towards improving ethnic diversity in agricultural production, law makers need to equip themselves with better knowledge about the problems all farmers and ranchers face and find solutions to those problems before under represented persons can be enticed in to becoming a farmer or rancher. There is no better place to acquire this needed knowledge than from the WSFB.

The YCFB suggests that legislators (who desire to assist under- represented minorities) forge a relationship with the WSFB (and County Farm Bureaus by extension) to better be able to construct a program that truly recruits under represented persons to become the agriculturalists of tomorrow.

Sincerely,

Mark Herke

President, Yakima County Farm Bureau