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Contacts:

Ian Tolleson, Government Affairs Director, Northwest Food Processors Association, 503-327-2200 Jenny Dresler, Director of State Public Policy, Oregon Farm Bureau, 503-399-1701

Oregon's Food Producers Dismayed by Minimum Wage Vote

Legislators ignore real concerns from farmers, ranchers and food processors

Oregon agriculture groups are very concerned that the minimum wage hike passed by the House today threatens the future of farming and food production in the state.

Hundreds of farmers, ranchers and food processors came to Salem in recent weeks to testify on the real and negative effects the minimum wage hike would have on their operations and their families. While lawmakers politely listened, they ignored these very real concerns. With today's vote, it is clear that their collective voice went unheard.

"Oregon's food makers now face a severe competitive disadvantage with products grown and made elsewhere in the world," said Ian Tolleson, Government Affairs Director of the Northwest Food Processors Association. "This not only jeopardizes jobs but entire rural communities."

"Today a single party majority sent a clear message that they do not value family agriculture in Oregon," said Barry Bushue, President of Oregon Farm Bureau. "This enormous increase will force many family farmers to try to find ways to mechanize or transition away from laborintensive products Oregon is known for, like apples, pears, milk and berries. Unfortunately, some will give up and sell, while others will simply go out of business."

The Northwest Food Processors and Oregon Farm Bureau were excluded from the negotiations the Governor convened between labor unions and Portland-based business groups. The minimum wage hike was then fast-tracked through a February, off-year session that was sold to voters in 2010 as an opportunity to reconcile budget issues and make technical fixes. Short

sessions were never meant to pass sweeping policy that would alter a significant portion of the state's economy.

Agriculture's economic footprint in Oregon tops \$34 billion annually, according to Oregon State University. Many families have contracted their crops for 2016 and with the wage increase slated to start this summer, it will be impossible for these producers to absorb new state-imposed costs. Even for those who have not contracted, the vast majority of farm and ranch families cannot raise prices to pay for the huge financial burden this bill puts on them. Jobs will be lost and unharvested food will go to waste.

"The impacts of the wage hike on its own are significant, but coupled with the cumulative effect of other mandates targeting employers — including sick leave, rising energy costs and state-run retirement — many family farms and ranches will have difficulty staying in business," said Bushue.

Northwest Food Processors and Oregon Farm Bureau thank the lawmakers who supported farmers, ranchers, and small businesses owners and voted against the minimum wage increase: all Republican representatives and Rep. Caddy McKeown (D-Coos Bay) and Rep. John Lively (D-Springfield).

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About Northwest Food Processors Association: Established in 1914, Northwest Food Processors Association (NWFPA) supports the needs of the Pacific Northwest food processing industry in Idaho, Oregon and Washington. Membership includes some of the foremost brand names in the food industry in the United States, key producers of private label and institutional products, and locally run family businesses.

About Oregon Farm Bureau: The state's largest general farm organization, Oregon Farm Bureau (OFB) is a grassroots, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization representing the interests of the state's family farmers and ranchers in the public and policymaking arenas.