



# Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

February 27, 2017

Department of Agriculture

635 Capitol St NE  
Salem, OR 97301-2532



The Honorable Kate Brown  
Governor

The Honorable Peter Courtney  
President of the Senate

The Honorable Tina Kotek  
Speaker of the House

Oregon State Capitol  
900 Court Street  
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Governor Brown, President Courtney, and Speaker Kotek,

On February 17, the State Board of Agriculture heard a presentation by state agencies on the devastation caused by winter storms in Malheur County. As you know, Board members represent Oregon agriculture throughout the state. All of us, no matter where we are from were stunned by what we heard and want to urge the state to do whatever possible to help the businesses and families in Malheur County and other parts of Eastern Oregon who are suffering as a result of the storm damage. Sadly, many Oregonians have only heard of Malheur County because of the recent crisis at the refuge. They know little or nothing about the generations of hard-working farming and ranching families who are a vital part of Oregon agriculture and what this damage means to their future.

We applaud your efforts so far to bring emergency aid to the Eastern Oregon communities, but there is much more to do if we are to restore and maintain a vibrant agricultural community that contributes much to Oregon's economy. Malheur County produces 1.1 billion pounds of onions annually. This county is also ranks eighth in the country in terms of number of beef cattle. Sugar beets, seed and forage crops, and potatoes are also produced in this region. The agricultural production and processing sector is the economic backbone for this community.

Simply put, the future of agriculture in Eastern and Southeastern Oregon is at risk if the state does not continue to lead in recovery efforts that will take months, if not years. For example, we heard that at least 1,000 mother cows on winter pasture are unaccounted for and assumed dead. This weather has significantly stressed animals; dairy farmers have seen a decline in milk production, livestock on feed are gaining 50-60 percent less than normal average daily gain, and mother cows are aborting calves. All of which will have long-term impacts to the health and longevity of the livestock sector. We also heard that onion growers are making plans to move to Idaho, for multiple reasons, but the damage to crops and infrastructure from this winter has forced this industry to a tipping point. We cannot lose this vital part of Oregon agriculture.



We urge you to take the following actions as soon as possible:

- Aggressively channel as much state financial assistance to the area as possible;
- Aggressively seek as much federal financial assistance as possible;
- Instruct state agencies to put more staff and equipment in the area to assist with cleanup and help those who need loans and grants to identify options;
- Establish a center with staff to assist businesses and families in completing paperwork and navigating the bureaucracy of state and federal financial assistance programs;
- Instruct state agencies to waive regulations and streamline processes for completing paperwork and/or cleaning up storm damage;
- Establish a team of Federal, State, local and NGO partners focused on helping the community recover – appoint a “boots on the ground” leader to ensure that efforts are coordinated and efficient;
- Ensure that insurance companies are being proactive in working with policy holders to bring financial assistance as quickly as possible;
- Develop incentives to keep the onion industry in Eastern Oregon.

Our hearts go out the people in Malheur County and other Eastern Oregon counties who have suffered so much in recent months. Please ensure that the state does everything possible to ensure a vibrant future for farming and ranching families and businesses who are the foundation of this historic and unique part of Oregon.

Sincerely,



Pete Brentano, Chair  
St. Paul

Members:

Barbara Boyer, McMinnville  
Stephanie Hallock, Lake Oswego  
Bryan Harper, Junction City  
Tracey Liskey, Klamath Falls  
Sharon Livingston, Long Creek  
Laura Masterson, Portland  
Marty Myers, Boardman  
Tyson Raymond, Helix  
Luisa Santamaria, Aurora

cc: The Honorable Senator Ted Ferrioli  
The Honorable Representative Cliff Bentz  
The Honorable Dan Joyce, Malheur County Judge  
The Honorable Don Hodge, Malheur County Commissioner  
The Honorable Larry Wilson, Malheur County Commissioner  
Director Alexis Taylor, Oregon Department of Agriculture