

February 26, 2019

To the House Committee on Agriculture and Land Use

Re: HB 2919 Relating to nonconforming schools in exclusive farm use zones; declaring an emergency.

My name is Beth Hoinacki and I live in Kings Valley, Oregon, a rural community located approximately 20 miles northwest of Corvallis in the foothills of the Coast Range. I am here today in support of House Bill 2919 and ask you to consider the positive impact this bill would have on our local agricultural community as well as our school community.

My family and I own and operate a small, diversified market farm in Kings Valley where we have been community members for almost 20 years. When we moved to the area from Corvallis in 1999 it was important to me to be in a community that self-identified as rural. Having grown up in just such a place, I highly value the land-based lifestyle and the unique characteristics among rural neighbors who depend on themselves and each other in so many ways. It was important to me to raise children in such a community and I am grateful that our children, now 13 and 16, have also been raised in our rural school since they were each 3 years old, and from which they both expect to graduate.

For our family, having a local school has meant my kids have more time at home at work and play rather than riding a school bus; I have opportunities to engage in volunteer activities that are convenient to my farm-based occupation; and I know my neighbors because many of them are school parents or work or volunteer at the school.

The school also supports many other local farm families. Every month growers in our agricultural community gather at a rotating potluck in our homes. These growers represent the diversity of the best of Oregon agriculture – timber, cow dairy, goat dairy, livestock production, berries and produce, tree fruit, and hazelnuts, among others. Many of these farm families have kids in our rural school and even more work or volunteer at the school. In addition to potluck, I see them when I drop off or pick up my kids or at one of our myriad of school productions. Many a so-called chance encounter at school has led to knowledge and resource sharing that helps support our farms.

On my own farm, I hire up to a dozen local teens each summer to pick blueberries. These kids come almost exclusively from the school or a school connection and have been paramount to my success as a farmer and to fulfill my mission of providing employment opportunities to local youth. In addition, we have partnered with the school for field trips and pumpkin patch opportunities.

I am fortunate to live in an educational community that highly values early childhood education, career and technical training for youth, and physical activity. For rural schools, especially preK-12 grade schools, the ability to offer a diversity of programming to a diverse range of children is challenging with limited physical and facility resources. We need options which House Bill 2919 will provide.

Oregon's land use laws are paramount to preserving farm land; however we must also be mindful of preserving the rural communities that engage in agricultural production on that land. It is my experience that local schools support rural communities and my belief that strengthening schools in rural areas will in turn strengthen those areas. House Bill 2919 does just that and I urge you to support it.

Beth Hoinacki
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