

Save Helvetia is a farmland preservation organization that works to protect farm and forestlands in Washington County. We are 10 years old but all members have been civically engaged for 25 plus years each. We champion citizen engagement and participation in land use and have multiple experiences of our inputs having improved local, regional, and state decision making. Most of this has been live/direct until recently. The legislature usually conducts hearings in the Spring and this is a very active time for farmers. Farmers cannot turn on a dime to travel to Salem for at least half a day to provide testimony. The recent remote access to public hearings and meetings that have arisen because of the pandemic has provided us the opportunity to see how its current use and its continuation can facilitate the inclusion of more farmers into the legislative process while providing the legislature with our citizen science perspectives. We have been fortunate in Washington County in that hearings typically only take us 1/2 day whereas other parts of Oregon would require at least day long travel and possible overnight lodging. Continuing remote access opens the door to improved citizen involvement in everyday democracy and provides the legislature an evolved base of information from which to make decisions.