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January 23, 2023

Chair Helm and Members
House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural resources & Water
State Capitol
Salem, OR

Re: HB 2487 – Wedding & event venues in exclusive farm use zone

Dear Chair Helm and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 2487, which would allow lands zoned for exclusive farm use (EFU), east of the summit of the Cascade Range, to be used for weddings or events, if conducted outdoors or in farm buildings and that comply with any county-defined limitations. 1000 Friends of Oregon opposes HB 2487

1000 Friends of Oregon is a nonprofit, membership organization that works with Oregonians to support livable urban and rural communities; protect family farms, forests and natural areas; and provide transportation and housing choice.

This bill would add weddings and events to the already too-long list of nonfarm activities that are allowed on EFU land. Already, weddings and other activities have been permitted on farm land through a broad use of loopholes in the “home occupation” statute, which was originally enacted to allow small, home-based work to occur in farm houses, garages, and barns. This has provided years of experiences of conflicts between farming operations and nonfarm events occurring on neighboring farmlands.

Farmers often complain of being asked to cease farming for a wedding or other event or to change their operations so noise, dust, and other common farming or ranching activities do not interfere with the wedding or wedding photos. Traffic congestion caused by these events has hindered the ability of farmers to move their equipment and transport their crops.

In addition, farmers don’t just work on their farms, they live on them, too. They understand and accept the frequency of farm-related equipment noise and smells from a nearby farm. But what is unacceptable, and yet happens, is that for some farmers, the music and other noise and traffic for these types of events happens every weekend night during the wedding season of May through September. These are the type of impacts that city dwellers would never tolerate in their residential neighborhoods, yet that is what some of these current venues are doing to the neighborhoods of farmers. The exclusive farm use zone is not a party zone.

Conditions imposed by counties on the events that should reduce the conflicts are often impossible to enforce, especially by under-staffed counties. Or, the local conditions put the burden on a farmer to complain about their neighbor, which is not a situation that anyone wants to be in. In many cases counties lack the resources to enforce, and circuit courts end up being the only other option. Needless to say that is no option at all for many people who lack the thick skin and financial resources to bring a lawsuit against a neighbor.

HB 2487 would make the current situation worse by allowing wedding and other event venues on farm and ranch land east of the Cascades without any statutory limits on the size of the buildings, number of guests, or frequency of events. These costs add up, adding to the many challenges that farmers and ranchers already face.

HB 2487 would make an existing problem worse, by broadening the ability to locate these venues in farming areas, without addressing the known problems with the home occupations statute.

Thank you for consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

Mary Kyle McCurdy
Deputy Director

