



Friends of Family Farmers ♦ PO Box 751 ♦ Junction City, OR 97448

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Dear Chair Helm, Vice-chairs Hartman and Owens, and Members of the committee;

My name is Alice Morrison and I am writing as the Co-Director of Friends of Family Farmers (FoFF) in opposition to HB 2487.

We understand the need to diversify farm income. Many of the over 1,600 farmers in our network have agritourism activities like farm stands, u-pick programs, farm tours and more as part of the way they keep their farm afloat. It is hard to be a small farmer in Oregon given current financial conditions, the price of land in our state, and the changing climate which throws off planting and growth calendars. We are all for creative solutions to make farms viable, but HB 2487 would exacerbate one of the biggest problems in our state: unequal land access.

We survey and conduct focus groups with our members every 2 years. In 2022 we conducted 12 focus groups reaching 100 farmers across the state and garnered 512 responses to our Family Farm Survey. Access to affordable and appropriate land was in the top 5 issues concerning our farmers right now. According to American Farmland Trust, farmland prices in Oregon rose over 10% per acre between 2020 and 2021, the highest rate on the West Coast. In our focus groups, farmers told us stories of leases being terminated, purchase offers outbid, and a general lack of affordable options for EFU-zoned and other appropriate farmland when sellers are enticed by cash offers and out-of-state wealth. Including weddings and events as an acceptable use for these properties would exacerbate this problem by incentivizing non-farmers to target EFU zoned land for purchase.

This is also especially concerning in counties east of the Cascades. If weddings and events are an acceptable use of EFU zoned land, we're concerned that watering a lawn or flower garden to create ambiance for these events would be considered a beneficial use of their water rights. With so many farmers struggling to get by on their water allocations in Central, Southern, and Eastern Oregon, it is inexcusable to use water designated for agricultural use for non-agricultural purposes. Because of the zero sum calculation and "use it or lose it" nature of our current water system, holding on to a water right that a piece of land does not need is actually taking water away from another farmer or keeping a new farmer from applying for a new water right. Because of the zoning of this land, many of these parcels have water rights, some of them senior to many others.

EFU zoned land is given that designation because it is the highest quality agricultural land in our state. The primary use of this land should be to grow our crops and graze our animals. All activities besides agricultural production should be secondary, and come to supplement this production. There are farms in our network who apply for permits through their counties and host a limited number of events and weddings every year as part of their revenue. We support

their efforts to work within county guidelines to host these events and those who wish to do so under the current system should be allowed. It is important to note that these events are a very small fraction of their farm's income and FoFF's position is that they should remain so.

If there was a provision in this bill to only allow events or wedding income as a small percentage of the total farm income (30% or less), we may reconsider our position on this piece of legislation. But as it is written, HB 2487 does not place a clear limitation on these events or require that they need to be secondary to farm production. This creates the possibility that EFU zoned land could be used exclusively for events and weddings, should the owner choose to abandon farm production in favor of this use. This will drive up the cost of farmland and put it further out of reach of the people who want to grow and raise food in Oregon. HB 2487 would make farmland less accessible to those who want to work it and therefore FoFF cannot support this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alice Morrison".

Alice Morrison
Co-Director
Friends of Family Farmers