

Senate Committee on Housing and Development
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: Testimony in Opposition to SB 648

Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Anderson, and members of the committee,

Founded in 1977, Thrive Hood River is Oregon's oldest regional land use watchdog group. We work with the tools of Oregon's land use system to promote good planning policies in the Hood River Valley.

Thrive advocates for bold changes in our statutes and our local code where there is a public interest. Thrive also defends the many virtues of our land use program from loopholes, non-enforcement, and bad legislation that weaken our statewide planning program.

The -1 amendment to SB 648 is a puzzling effort to invert the purported intent of SB 648. It's difficult to know whether this was done in good faith.

Our land use system should strive for clarity, enforceability, and alignment with our statewide planning goals. Poking holes through statutes with sneaky amendments is bad lawmaking, and it undermines confidence and social trust in the system and legislators.

In its original form, SB 648 was a good-faith effort at relieving agricultural lands of some of the immense pressures of the short-term rental and hobby farm economies.

The era of remote work and digital nomads has put farmland under incredible pressure. The allowance of wedding venues, short-term rentals, bed and breakfasts, and other "accessory" land uses have thrust farmland into the select real estate market of third homes and vacation rentals. In high-amenity regions like the Hood River Valley, large agricultural tracts lie fallow as they become Instagram assets that ornament high-end short-term rentals, McMansions, breweries, retail wine locations, and restaurants masquerading as "tasting rooms" or other agri-tourism experiences.

As a result, Exclusive Farm Use lots in the Hood River Valley of little over 1 acre are selling for close to \$1 million. Prices like these are sustained by "accessory" buildings turned into a second dwelling that can be rented out and the use of lots for a diverse palette of "home occupations." Prices like these put farmland out of the hands of farmers.

Last year, the New York Times documented this phenomenon in an article entitled "How 'Fairy Tale' Farms Are Ruining Hudson Valley Agriculture." The article describes a "modern-day feudal system" where farmers are being forced to lease land from urban landowners on a

seasonal basis; these farmers try to grow food in the leftover tracts not used as corporate retreat grounds, wedding grounds, farm-based breweries, and agri-tourism experiences.

We are trading in the futures of hard-working farmers for a short-term, disposable Airbnb economy, and in many agricultural areas like the Hood River Valley, it is impossible for young farmers to get a toehold.

From 2010 to 2015, most of the named purchasers in the top 10 acquisitions of farmland, by price, in the Columbia Gorge region were real estate and property management companies, not farmers. The numbers in the post-Covid economy are certainly worse.

This committee needs to urgently act on this problem, not abet it, as -1 does.

Sincerely,

Nico Salter, Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nico Salter". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Nico" being more prominent than the last name "Salter".

Thrive Hood River