



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

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Chair Helm, Vice-Chairs Hartman and Owens and members of the committee:

I am writing on behalf of Friends of Family Farmers to express our strong support for HB 3366 and the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program on behalf of the more than 1,600 small and midsize farmers and ranchers we represent across the state. This program is crucial for tackling the farmland affordability crisis that we are facing here in Oregon and ensure that our valuable farmland is kept in production for generations to come.

Every 2 years, we use focus groups and surveys to connect with the farmers in our networks across the state. According to our 2022 report¹, access to affordable and appropriate land is the top concern of many of our farmers. Land is the most basic ingredient to the success of a farm or ranch business and Oregon is in a crisis of farmland affordability. According to American Farmland Trust, Oregon has the fastest rising farmland prices on the West Coast. With the average age of Oregon's farmers close to 60, we need to be taking steps to make sure our farmland is accessible to the next generation of producers.

The Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program is a step toward that goal. The conservation easement project within this program provides a crucial pathway to ensure that our lands will be stewarded in accordance with the values of sustainability and keeps them in production in perpetuity. With challenges to our land use law coming from all sides this session and specific threats to our EFU zoned land from industrial interests like semiconductor manufacturers, it is not enough to rely on current zoning law to keep farmland in production. Easements are a tool for landowners to make the permanent choice to protect their land.

They also reduce the cost of farmland by removing development and resource extraction rights. Without these possible uses, the land can be purchased for the agricultural value. This makes prime farmland more accessible to farmers, who do not have massive cash offers to compete with out of state buyers snapping up good farm ground in many parts of the state. This is also a program with a proven track record of attracting federal funds to expand its reach. State funds invested here will have double (or more) impact because of the resources available at the national level. Failing to take advantage of this opportunity would be the state leaving money for our farmers on the table and putting Oregon behind. I urge you to support HB 3366 and fully fund the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program.

Sincerely,

Alice Morrison, Co-Director, Friends of Family Farmers

¹ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OTYggcyNiofkzpUI_3d9deaf9ATBD-Ti/view