

Submitter: Eric Larsen

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2979

Dear Co-Chair Helm, Co-Chair Owens, and members of the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Wildfire:

My name is Eric Larsen and I own and operate a small family farm in Albany. I began transitioning a former grass seed farm into a fruit and nut orchard on approximately 6 acres two years ago and raise pastured poultry on the lanes between the trees. I also have a small apiary in the orchard, used for both pollination and honey sales. I do not have water rights, so rely on water catchment and storage to provide water for the trees. This requires manually watering trees during the summer months, typically by carrying buckets to individual trees, which is both time consuming and wasteful due to spillage. Extended dry periods and drought increase the evaporation of water and increases the risk of just running out of water before rain starts again.

In 2024, I received a Farmer and Rancher Disaster Resilience grant to install water storage tanks and drip irrigation in the orchard. This immediately made a difference in the establishment of trees that year, efficiently watering seedlings during critical root establishment. More importantly, and unexpectedly, it significantly improved my orchards resilience during a grass fire that spread into the orchard in late summer. Approximately 1/3 of the orchard, and most of the apiary, was destroyed by the fire. Amazingly, the trees that were irrigated though the grant mostly recovered. Those that did not, still had living roots and were able to regrow in the fall. I will be able to regraft onto these rootstalks this spring. While the orchard had a significant setback, due to the water storage and irrigation from the grant, it was just a setback and not the end of the orchard.

Please support HB 2979 to renew funding for this valuable program.

Thank you,

Eric Larsen
Larsen Farm and Orchard
Albany, OR 97322