

March 3, 2025

RE: Testimony for the Support of HB3346

Chairs Helm and Owens, Vice-Chair McDonald, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Daniel Jansen from Christmas Valley. My wife and family own and operate an alfalfa hay farm and cattle operation. I am testifying in support of HB3346.

Our farm operation is located in the Fort Rock Hydrological Basin. This basin is considered a critical groundwater area by the OWRD. In 1980 the farmers in the basin created a moratorium on water rights for the basin with the advice of the OWRD. This proved to be a valuable management decision that has helped to ensure irrigated acreage in the basin did not exceed water resources available for sustaining a viable agricultural economy for future decades.

However, the downside to a moratorium is that new or young farmers have a near impossible chance at securing enough irrigated ground to support a business. Start up or expansion can only be done by buying existing water rights which currently have an inflated market value not feasible for current levels of revenue generation.

The challenges for producing crops here are many. Due to the high elevation, the frost-free growing season is only around 150 days. Even then we have hard frosts sporadically within this window that will kill many crops. Therefore, cropping systems are reduced to alfalfa hay for export and some grain crops for local markets. These markets are extremely variable and unpredictable lately. Farm income currently is depressed at levels not seen since the 1980s. With no other options for crops to be grown at this elevation, farmers are forced to rely on other sources of revenue to keep farms stable until better prices emerge.

Pivot irrigation dominates this area. "Pivots" are typically circle-shaped irrigation fields situated on quarter section plots (figure 1). This means they consume 160-acre square quarter section. However, because the area irrigated is a circle, the corners of the fields are not irrigated. This equates to an actual irrigated field size typically around 130 acres. Each corner leaves about 8 acres of non-irrigated area. In the high desert where the annual rainfall is less than 10", no other crops can be grown, and grazing is not practical.



figure 1.

This leaves the corners, about 30 acres useless to a farmer. With no way to efficiently irrigate these corners, water rights are transferred to other fields. This combined with the fact that no water rights will be available for future use on these corners, this land is truly useless for any kind of revenue to the landowner.

One idea to use these corners is for solar power generation. Pivot irrigation systems are operated using electrical power. This is 3-phase service to operate water pumps to pump water from the ground and power to operate the motors to move the irrigation apparatus. This means that there is a high-capacity power distribution system feeding every pivot. If farmers are allowed to establish solar or other green energy generation systems, the infrastructure needed to facilitate transmission is already in close proximity.

The potential for green energy generation to offset the demand of energy needed to operate the pivot and possible excess to put onto the grid exists. This could potentially help farmers in these restricted areas to create stable revenue sources without expansion which is limited to critical groundwater designations and moratoriums. As most of our rural areas are served by power cooperatives, their need for green energy sourcing is in high demand and this will provide an avenue to place more green energy into the market.

To make this idea become feasible there are foreseeable obstacles to navigate. One of the most concerning for farmers would be taxation for taking the corner acreage out of Exclusive Farm Use (EFU) and rezoning to this industrial or whatever is required for energy production designation. EFU would require this acreage to be assessed a

payback of deferred taxes and then be placed in a high taxation classification. As research is done to determine the economic feasibility using these corners for green energy production the costs related from taxation will create a budgetary constraint and could be a deterrent for adoption of this concept for many farmers.

House Bill 3346 provides a great jumping off point to start examining the feasibility of this idea. These critical groundwater areas have such limited economical value beyond what is currently being experienced. The idea of using non-irrigated land situated in field situations such as described above could provide a great opportunity for green energy generation and help the economies of these struggling rural communities.

I thank Representative Owens for championing this bill, and I am encouraged by the support for this bill from Midstate Electric Cooperative. I hope strong partnerships will provide opportunity for this concept.

Thanks for all that you do. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Daniel Jansen
Christmas Valley