RE: Oppose SB 1153 – Water Transfer Restrictions

As a member of both the Oregon and Marion County Farm Bureau and a working farmer in both Marion and Yamhill counties, I am writing to urge you to OPPOSE Senate Bill 1153. This bill proposes to significantly alter the water right transfer process in a way that would reduce flexibility, increase litigation, and add unnecessary delays for Oregon's agricultural producers.

Today's reality is that new water rights are practically unavailable - transfers are the only way farmers can responsibly and efficiently manage existing water rights. Our operations depend on the ability to make these adjustments, whether to shift between fields, adapt to drought, or improve conservation outcomes.

SB 1153 would add two new criteria that are vague and redundant to the already rigorous transfer evaluation process:
1. Whether a transfer might affect instream habitat for sensitive, threatened, or endangered aquatic species—even in reaches not protected by an existing water right;
2. Whether a transfer might contribute to water quality impairments in already listed streams.

Agencies currently involved in the transfer process already have the authority to secure instream rights and address water quality concerns through existing law so there is no need to give discretionary power to agencies not currently involved in the transfer process or agencies who do not have the scientific expertise needed.

Unfortunately, these new requirements will end up with lengthy multi-agency reviews and legal challenges from third-party opponents. For farmers, this means uncertainty, delay, and potentially losing access to water at the worst possible time.

Oregon farmers are already navigating new groundwater rules and increasingly difficult conditions. SB 1153 moves us in the wrong direction. We need policies that support responsible use and flexibility - not additional roadblocks

Please stand with Oregon agriculture and vote NO on SB 1153. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Dana Estensen