

Submitter: James Best
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Natural Resources and
Wildfire
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1153

Testimony in Opposition to SB 1153

Honorable Members of the Oregon Legislative Assembly,

My name is James Best, and I am a small family farmer in Oregon. I am writing to express my strong opposition to SB 1153, which, while well-intentioned, will place further burdens on small farmers like myself who are already struggling to stay afloat.

Water is the lifeblood of farming. Without reliable access to water, we cannot grow crops, sustain livestock, or continue our way of life. As a small farmer, I do not have the same financial resources as large corporate farms to navigate complicated bureaucratic processes, pay for costly new infrastructure, or endure lengthy delays in water rights approvals. Unfortunately, SB 1153 would make all of these challenges even worse.

First, the bill introduces additional layers of review and oversight, including tribal input, new reporting requirements, and discretionary conditions imposed by the Water Resources Department. While I respect the need for responsible water management, these new regulations create uncertainty and delays that small farmers simply cannot afford. When our livelihoods depend on timely water access, waiting weeks or months for government approval could mean the difference between a successful harvest and financial ruin.

Second, the bill grants the state the authority to impose costly new mandates, such as water measurement devices and fish screens. While such measures may be easy for large operations to implement, for small farms already operating on razor-thin margins, these additional expenses could be devastating. Many of us are already struggling with rising costs of fuel, fertilizer, and equipment. Adding more financial strain through regulatory mandates could force more family farms out of business, leaving only corporate agriculture standing.

Third, the bill's focus on preventing perceived harm to aquatic species and water quality could result in undue restrictions on farmers without clear, science-based justifications. Farmers care deeply about the land and water we rely on—we are stewards of our environment. However, blanket regulations that fail to account for the real-world impact on small farms will only serve to erode our ability to survive and sustain Oregon's agricultural heritage.

Furthermore, Oregon's food economy has been in steady decline. Food affordability has worsened as local farming has been pushed aside in favor of cash crops that benefit large agribusiness rather than the people of Oregon. If we truly care about Oregon, we should stimulate local farming, not stifle it with excessive regulations. Supporting small, sustainable farms is key to ensuring fresh, locally grown food remains available and affordable for our communities.

At a time when small farmers are already fighting to stay competitive in a market dominated by large agribusiness, SB 1153 would pile on more red tape, higher costs, and greater uncertainty. Instead of enacting policies that put family farms at risk, we should be working toward solutions that protect natural resources while ensuring that small farms can continue to thrive.

I urge you to reject SB 1153 and consider alternative approaches that balance water conservation with the needs of Oregon's family farmers. Our livelihoods—and the future of local, sustainable agriculture—depend on it.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
James Best
Yamhill County Oregon