

Co-chairs Helm and Owens, Vice-Chair Finger McDonald and members of the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources and Water:

My name is Sharon Blick and I am a rural resident of Lane County near Eugene. I am writing today to support HB 3372. I believe that rural residents should be allowed to sell food that they grow or buy food that their neighbors grow as long as no one without a water right is irrigating more than ½ acre. The limit of 5,000 gallons or even 3,000 gallons per day is irrelevant since no one would ever use anywhere close to that amount of water to irrigate ½ acre.

Rural residents need food. Why should they drive to a distant grocery store to buy food that has probably been trucked across the country when they can buy better, fresher food from their neighbor? What will they do for food in the advent of a disaster? For local food security and for environmental sustainability, HB 3372 makes sense.

When I bought my 15 acres in 2007 with the intention of starting a farm, I did not know and my realtor did not tell me about the groundwater rights law. My land is flat with a high water table. My well produces way more water than I ever needed. The flow never went down in the summer and my neighbors also had wells with plenty of water. I never did irrigate more than half an acre and I estimate that I used only 10,000 gallons of water PER YEAR because I used mostly drip irrigation and I applied a lot of compost and mulch which increases the water holding capacity of the soil and decreases evaporation.

Initially I was only farming livestock on non-irrigated pastures, so I did not need a water right. I was also growing vegetables and fruit for my own family which also does not require a water right. By the time I learned about the groundwater rights law, I knew many other farmers without water rights who were growing much more irrigated produce than I was. I looked into getting a water right, but it was so expensive that it did not make economic sense. As it was, my farm was either losing money or barely breaking even every year. My farm business is now closed. I am still growing food for my family and it would be nice if I could sell the extras.

You can grow a lot of food on just a half acre. I estimated that I grew over 20 tons of produce in 17 years and for most of those years I was irrigating only a quarter acre or less and never fully optimizing production. But from what I know about farming and other farms, I can say with confidence that it would be really difficult to make a living from a farm business based on irrigating only ½ acre. What this means is that passing HB 3372 is not going to lead to an increase in commercial farms or an increase in groundwater use. The farmers without water rights who are trying to make a living growing crops are either going

to move to land with a water right or build a pond or roof-catchment so they can irrigate more than half an acre. This change has already happened to many farms I know.

I am a lifelong environmentalist and outdoor educator. I have a Masters degree in stream ecology. I rafted, canoed, and fished for many years. I serve on the non-profit boards of a land trust, a butterfly club, and a nature sanctuary. I care about water conservation and protection of in-stream flows. I would not be supporting HB 3372 if I believed it would have a negative impact on Oregon's streams, rivers, and wildlife. I am or have been a member of several of the environmental groups opposing this bill, and they do not speak for me. I am surprised to see them allied with the Farm Bureau. They are failing to recognize the environmental impacts of corporate agriculture and food transportation.

I was inspired to start farming after reading about our broken food system in Michael Pollan's book *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. Now, 18 years later, our food system is more broken than ever. We need to be sourcing our food locally and growing it ecologically and ethically. We need to have anyone who is willing and able to grow nutrient-dense food to be doing it on any land that is available. Currently, growing food is the least profitable way to use land in the Willamette Valley. We should be creating incentives to get people to grow food. HB 3372 is one small step in that direction and I hope you will pass it.

Thank you,

Sharon Blick

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