

## **Testimony of Rebecca Landis in support of HB 3372**

Chair Helm, members of committee, thank you for this hearing.

I write in support of HB 3372 as both a longtime farmers' market manager and the co-owner of a small farm. I don't want to see the next generation of young farmers diminished -- especially as "boomer" farmers retire -- because we failed to address this solvable issue.

HB 3372 has the potential to increase access to locally grown foods at a time when our nation's imported food supply faces multiple economic threats. Even if this weren't the case, there is never a bad time to boost our local economies and make sure our neighbors have access to fresh foods grown close to home.

While I have not seen amendments, I am confident this committee can craft a solution that can help small farms and customers without escalating water shortages or infringing on existing property rights. We have data showing domestic wells are not the source of the crisis.

Many people who own or lease small ag properties would rather help feed their communities than squander precious water on lawns. Similarly, the 5,000 gallon a day commercial exemption is of little use to growers needing this change. It's a head scratcher that someone could use the commercial exemption to wash or transform produce but not to grow it for sale.

Commercial gardens and small farms are often run by caring and creative growers who research and implement the best ways to water efficiently, such as drip irrigation informed by careful observation. They are concerned about both water quality and sufficiency as community imperatives.

Thank to legislation passed in 2011 and 2023, Oregon offers multiple channels for small farmers to sell directly to local customers. To sell produce legally, these growers would gladly accept reasonable restrictions to protect water resources, including gallon limits.

This year OSU Extension is teaching farmers how to use moisture sensors to know when water is actually needed. It began with a session at the well-attended OSU Small Farms Conference in February of this year, and there will be at least two hands-on workshops. My organization is using state climate resilience funds to send Albany Farmers' Market vendors to these learning experiences.

Excessive watering increases produce size and weight, but farmers' market customers and other fans of farm direct agriculture want fully flavored produce.

Dry farming methods yield foods that are sought after by savvy customers. But not all crops are candidates for dry farming, and there's a lot of good middle ground options between dry farming and standard approaches.

I also see potential for younger members of agricultural families with large operations to experiment with small farm direct ventures even if the main enterprise is a non-irrigated crop.

Pass a good policy via HB 3372, and watch proudly as Oregon growers obtain the best results from the least possible amount of water use!