

Submitter: Jessica Helgerson

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3372

My name is Jessica Helgerson. I am a gardener and community member living on Sauvie Island, and I am writing in strong support of HB 3372.

Under current Oregon law it is legal to water a ½ acre garden or use 5,000 gal/day for a commercial purpose, but NOT to grow food and farm products for sale. Why this is has been a mystery to me since we dug a domestic well 15 years ago. Why is it legal to use the water for personal use, or a non-farm commercial use, but not to grow food for sale on EFU land?

We've hosted CSA operations on our property, businesses that provided organic produce to 50 families weekly through an eight month season. The fact that these very small farms were in ostensible violation of Oregon water use laws was a key reason for stopping the collaboration, which was otherwise highly productive and joyful. It also, in its fullest swing, never used more than a few hundred gallons of water a day, that is, far less than I'd be allowed to use to power wash my driveway, run a slip-and-slide for my kids, or water a lawn monoculture.

We need to approach water use in this state rationally, and small farms (especially those on small acreage such as mine) are very difficult to maintain as going concerns. There's no reasonable path for me to establishing irrigation water rights, and the fact is that 88% of wells in this state are domestic while using 4% of groundwater, at the same time that irrigation rights holders account for 7% of the number of wells, but 82% of the water pumped from the groundwater. Allowing domestic well owners to draw a limited amount of water for commercial farm production (on no more that 1/2 acre) will NOT "bankrupt" our water system. Arguments to the contrary are made in bad faith by actors with a stranglehold on water rights granted from the common good at the expense OF those commons.

Being able to host small sand beginning farmers on our land would mean: the activation of otherwise fallow ground for real farm use; the increase in our community's food resilience and sovereignty; the ability to imagine our hobby gardening turning into income generation as a retirement project; and the cultivation of another generation of farmers close to the Portland metro area. All of this seems like an unqualified good that this bill makes possible. pass HB 3372.