

Submitter: Vicki Helmig

On Behalf Of:

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

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3372

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 Vicki Helmig and I am a farmer and the vendor coordinator for our local farmers market from Molalla. I am writing today to support HB 3372. Currently in Oregon it is legal to water a ½ acre garden or use 5,000 gal/day for a commercial purpose, but neither of those apply to growing food and farm products for sale. Why is it legal to use the water for personal use, but selling a single zucchini from my garden would mean I was breaking the law? It is legal for schools to water green spaces for children to play, but I cannot water produce to feed those children and their families.

This personally impacts me because we always aim to follow the law. As soon as we were made aware that it was illegal to irrigate our crops from our domestic well, we stopped doing so. This is true of many other small farms in our area as well. This drastically decreased our farm participation in our farmers market as many of our local farms that were participating are small farms with only a domestic well on the property. We were already working on learning more about dry farming before we were aware that the law prohibits irrigating crops without a water right and from a water source separate from our domestic well. Unfortunately, there is a very big learning curve. We intend to continue to work on dry farming to increase the amount of food we can grow while decreasing the water needed to do so. Being able to legally water 1/2 an acre would make a very big difference for us. It would not drastically increase our water use as that is all we've really watered in the past and we've always used as little as possible. There are also many of our vendors that would bring extra vegetables from their garden to sell with their handcrafted items. That stopped last year in light of this new enforcement of the laws around irrigation. The impact that had on our market as a whole was detrimental. We had a major decrease in attendance with many taking the time to tell us they aren't coming anymore because there aren't enough farms.

We need to be realistic about what we prioritize for water use in our state. Allowing people to grow food or farm products for sale with a gallon restriction on ½ acre will not bankrupt the system, and farming is too much work for people to rush into production on such a small scale. Give communities back the ability to feed and provide for themselves, pass HB 3372.

Additionally, allowing us to irrigate from our domestic well would be less of a burden

on our local water sources. Since I learned that we can legally get the water from our local municipality and we have the equipment resources to do so, taking thousands of gallons from our local municipality that is already taxed heavily by the additional population that has recently increased in our town, so much so that a couple of years ago the city had to put out water advisements, would be much more detrimental to our local community than using our domestic well accessing underground streams up in the hills that are not being heavily used.

On another note, our town has a very high poverty rate. Allowing anyone to irrigate this small amount of acreage with the intent or possible intent (ie gardeners with more than they needed) to sell their produce allows us to offer the produce at a more affordable rate. The cost involved in obtaining an additional water source as well as the cost of the water right would largely impact the price the produce would have to be sold for, making local food inaccessible to many of our local community members by making the price prohibitive.

Thank you,

Vicki Helmig
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