

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 Tiffany Price, and I am a teacher and homesteader from Springfield. I am writing today in support of HB 3372. In Oregon, it is currently 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 for sale. Why is it legal to use the water for personal use, but even if I used less water than many use to water their lawns, selling garden products, or even offering them for a donation, would result in my breaking the law? How can we buy locally if we can't grow locally?

This personally impacts me and my husband in a variety of ways. He and I moved to our new home two years ago, with the intention of connecting more closely with the natural world and providing food for ourselves and for our community. We were told the property was previously used as a state-licensed cannabis operation, and were excited to shift the property's use toward a positive contribution to the community. As this home is the first experience either of us has had with a well, we made an assumption that because the water had been used specifically for the production of an agricultural crop, that we could use it to grow fruits and vegetables. Our goal is to provide healthy fresh food to our local community, and to teach families how to produce food of their own; to uphold our values of giving back. There are so many families who are not able to afford high-quality food for their meals, and we know poor nutrition has significant negative effects on health. That our donation-based "Free Farm Stand" is not allowed under Oregon law is both disappointing and mind-boggling.

We need to be thoughtful about what we prioritize for water use in our state. The OWRD estimates that commercial growers holding active water rights comprise 7% of the number of all wells in Oregon, but account for 82% of the groundwater pumped for any reason in the state. Domestic wells, on the other hand, make up about 88% of all wells in Oregon and account for only 4% of the groundwater pumped for any reason. A small fraction of this 4%, far fewer than 1 in 4 wells, might be used to irrigate produce on small farms and backyard gardens that is subsequently sold to the public. One might see the effort to enforce water rights law by going after individuals collectively consuming well under 1% of the state's groundwater as somewhat misplaced. This law needs to be revisited, and HB 3372 can do that.

Small farmers growing food for sale on ½ acre is not making the impact, nor will it make the impact, many want to believe. Allowing communities the ability to feed and provide for themselves is much more representative of Oregon values than what is currently in place. Passing HB 3372 would bring to light the disparities in water use, and allow those of us willing to put in the immensely hard work necessary to bring healthy foods to market to do so.

Thank you,
Tiffany J. Price
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