

Written Testimony in Opposition to SB 1153

**Submitted by Lauren Lucht, Owner/Operator, Northwest Transplants
Molalla, Oregon**

Chair and Members of the Senate Committee on Rules,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 1153. I am writing to express my strong opposition to this bill on behalf of my family farm and business, Northwest Transplants, located just outside of Molalla.

We produce over 80 million vegetable and herb seedlings annually, supporting hundreds of farmers across Oregon and the Pacific Northwest. In addition, we farm over 140 acres of fresh market vegetables, including watermelons and pumpkins—that are distributed both wholesale and through local retail stands. As you can imagine, accessing irrigation water is not just important to our operation, it is essential to our survival.

SB 1153 proposes the most sweeping changes to Oregon water law in decades without clear justification. It threatens agriculture’s last remaining tool—water right transfers—for making responsible, efficient, and adaptive use of water. In doing so, it undermines farmers’ ability to survive unpredictable markets, climate extremes, and shifting crop demands.

Our work is dynamic by necessity. The vegetable processing market evolves constantly, and with it, so do our cropping plans. Some years bring bumper crops; others bring drought, floods, labor shortages, or pricing collapses. Our ability to navigate these challenges depends on having access to tools like water right transfers—tools that allow us to adapt quickly and legally to new conditions without sacrificing production.

SB 1153 removes that flexibility by authorizing the Oregon Water Resources Department to deny or condition transfers based on vague, undefined standards like “possible loss of fish habitat” or “contribution to water quality impairment”—even when no actual harm has occurred. These terms are open-ended, subjective, and lack scientific definition. They open the door to delay, litigation, and inconsistent enforcement, with small family farms like mine bearing the brunt of the cost and uncertainty.

Meanwhile, urban water users are exempt from these same standards, despite holding comparable rights. That double standard is deeply troubling. Rural Oregon should not be punished for using water responsibly, especially when the tools and agencies already exist to protect streamflow and water quality.

Oregon’s family farmers and ranchers already operate under strict oversight from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Department of Environmental Quality.

These agencies have the authority—and the responsibility—to protect instream flows. SB 1153 overrides that framework and layers on unnecessary bureaucracy without accountability, timelines, or clarity.

I urge the Legislature to slow down. A bill of this magnitude deserves a transparent, inclusive, and science-based conversation—not a rushed process that sidelines the very people it impacts. Agriculture is willing to be at the table and to work toward long-term solutions that benefit farms, fish, and all Oregonians. But SB 1153, as written, creates more problems than it solves.

Please oppose SB 1153. Oregon's farms—and Oregon's food system—depend on your willingness to prioritize balance, common sense, and cooperation.

Sincerely,

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