

Submitter: Narendra Varma
On Behalf Of: Our Table Cooperative
Committee: House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural
Resources, and Water
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4153

My Name is Narendra Varma and I am a farmer and farm stand operator on a 58 acre farm in Sherwood. I am writing to you today to express my opposition to HB 4153. Farm stands are a vital part of connecting the public with our food system and building an understanding of what it takes to go from field to fork. But HB 4153 would restrict who is allowed to have a farm stand, replace current definitions with Farm Stores, and give large land owners privileges at the expense of small farm stands in Oregon. We need to find a better solution.

Although my farm and existing farm stand/store which has been in operation since 2015 would qualify under the current HB 4153 text, I feel this bill language unfairly penalizes small start up farms and benefits large operations that often pay lip service to being a farm while in reality go against the spirit of Oregon land-use laws -- which amongst other goals is to promote local agriculture. A "farm" that conducts primarily tourism/entertainment activities while not actually growing any crops of commercial value does not meet the spirit of the law and I am opposed to new regulations that benefit this class of operations even further at the cost of real farms that feed our community and also generate revenue from other activities. I am also strongly opposed to "farm-to-table" events that do not use ingredients from the host farm - these type of events are just pop-up restaurants in disguise and I have personally attended some where the location/venue farm had absolutely no relationship to the meal being served. This is again, against the spirit if not the letter of the law in my opinion.

I am sure that better solutions can be found. I strongly support farm stands, farm stores, and agritourism events but all of these activities need reasonable limits so that they do not become trojan horse for unnecessary and unwanted activities on protected land. The farm/forest property tax deferral is a huge public "subsidy" from urban and sub-urban landowners to rural/farm/forest landowners. In exchange, we natural resource landowners must do our duty to "earn" this subsidy by following the letter and spirit of Oregon land-use. If the current rules are unclear or insufficient, let's change them but let's do so without benefitting small groups of special interests.

Thank you,

- Narendra Varma
Executive Director, Our Table Cooperative

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