

To: Oregon Senate Committee on Natural Resources, and to all Senators and Representatives

Re: Senate Bill 1561

I am writing in opposition to the size limitation on replacement dwellings in SB1561. While it is helpful for the legislature to make it easier to replace an older farm house, it is not helpful to restrict the size of a new dwelling. Many older rural homes are under 1200 square feet. The average size of newer homes is about 2500 square feet. If an aspiring farmer cannot replace an older house with one that fits their family needs, you are effectively not supporting a family farm. Instead this type of restriction ensures that no one wants the farm with a tiny old house and then mega farms buy the land up. Why does the legislature need to take an interest in the size of house people build on their own property? The idea that this “preserves farmland” is ludicrous – a 2500 square foot house can be built on the same footprint as a 1250 square foot house by adding a second story. Adding 1000 square feet to the footprint of a house on even a small 10 acre farm is less than 0.2 percent of the land, and on a larger farm it is likely less than .05 percent (.0005) of the farm. In fact, intensity of farmland use may increase if a larger family can live there and work the land. Due to the average age of farmers in Oregon, many family farms will change hands in the coming years and the new generation will want to modernize or upgrade the old houses on those farms. They should be supported in that effort, which makes the farm more viable and adds to the county tax base.

So the size limit provision:

- provides no public benefit,
- imposes an unnecessary limitation on a few rural landowners and devalues their land
- has a public cost in reducing county tax base,
- damages family farms, and
- does nothing to change how much farmland is in use.

Farm owners should be allowed to build replacement dwellings and convert the old farm house to worker dwelling. This would increase housing availability, allow the farmer to intensify the farm use of the land, support small family farms, and cost others nothing. Who exactly is harmed if the old house is allowed to stand and a second home is built on the property? This type of government overreach into private property is one reason people now are willing to stand by and see the government being destroyed – they don’t differentiate state from federal, they just hate all government. In summary, please delete land use provisions that restrict or limit replacement dwellings, and instead support the ability of farmers to provide worker housing.

Sincerely,

Katherine Beale