

Submitter: Natalie Bendt

On Behalf Of:

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

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4153

Co-Chair Helm, Co-Chair Owens, Vice-Chair McDonald, and members of the committee,

My name is Natalie Bendt and I am resident of Salem, a born-and-raised Oregonian, and a proud supporter of local farms and small businesses.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on HB 4153. I urge you to vote no on this bill.

I oppose HB 4153, which will allow nonfarm activities as a primary use on farmland, incentivize commercial development on exclusive farm use land, and disregard the impacts of these activities on neighboring farms.

Without stronger requirements tying nonfarm commercial activity directly to ongoing agricultural production, HB 4153 opens the door to de facto rural commercial development under the guise of “farm stores.”

HB 4153 creates a powerful incentive to site retail stores and restaurant-like uses on agricultural land zoned for exclusive farm use because it is cheaper, taxed at farm-use value, and located outside city commercial regulations. This undermines local farmers who actually want to farm, as development makes land unaffordable for new and beginning farmers. It also threatens the vitality of nearby towns and small cities, which rely on their commercial districts for jobs and tax base.

For decades, Oregon has made deliberate policy choices to concentrate commercial development inside urban growth boundaries while protecting agricultural land for agricultural use. I support farmer-owned and operated stores, restaurants, and event venues inside our cities and small towns. I support direct sales for farmers under existing farm stand provisions that require farming to remain the predominant use.

HB 4153 moves the state in the opposite direction and risks incremental but permanent erosion of EFU protections. By voting no on this bill, you will be protecting the critical land base on which Oregon’s \$42 billion agricultural industry depends. Thank you for considering my comments and allowing this opportunity for public input.