

Submitter: Wendy McGowan

On Behalf Of:

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

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4153

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

I urge you to oppose HB 4153, which would require counties to allow large commercial stores on farmland, because:

I rely on several very small farm operations in my neighborhood to access a good portion of the food for our family. Plus, interacting with these small farmers builds community and has helped us meet neighbors and make friends - as well as foster a sense of safety. Being able to eat food that is grown nearby is important to me. These small farms and dedicated farmers and their sustainable practices are major reasons why my husband and I bought our current home. This bill has a number of good provisions, but is too flawed as now written.

The bill has no requirement that the farmer operate the "farm store," which will attract outside capital investment and drive up the cost of farmland by opening up our Exclusive Farm Use zones to nonfarm hospitality business interests. Farmers grow food; they don't run hospitality businesses.

Existing law already allows farmers to sell their farm products to the public, host educational events and activities like u-picks, and sell nonfarm retail items up to 25% of the farm stand's total annual sales.

By removing "farm stands" as an allowable use in Exclusive Farm Use zones, the bill creates unnecessary new regulations for farmers who simply want to sell their farm products to the public.

The bill allows 95% or more of a "farm store" square footage to be used for retail merchandise and prepared food and beverages, with no connection to the farm where the farm store is located. This would allow commercial retail and hospitality activities as the primary use of farmland.

The bill creates confusion with existing laws that regulate agritourism, allowing weeks-long events and mass gatherings without any consideration of impacts to working farmers.

HB 4153 is too complicated and too controversial to be taken up in the short

legislative session.

Sincerely,