

Submitter: Elaine Stewart
On Behalf Of: Board of Directors Tualatin SWCD
Committee: House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural
Resources, and Water
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4153

Co-Chairs Helm and Owens, esteemed members of the Committee:

The elected Board of Directors of the Tualatin Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) opposes HB 4153 in its current form. Our SWCD works with farmers, foresters, and other landowners to conserve farmland, provide technical assistance to achieve soil and water quality benefits, control invasive species and support wildlife habitat.

We support farm stands, farmers markets and other strategies for farmers to make a living. Farmers have raised concerns with current rules around farm stands, but HB 4153 would make matters worse. A different bill, developed in partnership with our farmers, is needed and should be brought before a regular session rather than a short session where there is not enough time for thoughtful discussion among those affected by it.

This bill removes the requirement that land zoned Exclusive Farm Use be predominantly in agriculture. This will incentivize non-farm primary uses such as concert venues, wedding facilities, and other businesses to operate on farmland at reduced tax rates. In Washington County we have some of the best soils in the world and they need to be kept in farming.

Further, the bill eliminates the good neighbor analysis currently required for legitimate agritourism uses to ensure against negative effects on neighboring farms. It also defines the local agricultural area as anywhere in Oregon, severing the link between products grown at the farm and the consumer. Together, these provisions erode protections for farmland and put farms at risk.

Commercial nonfarm uses should not be allowed to consume Oregon's prime farmland, drive up land costs, create hazards and conflicting uses with neighbors, and take farmland out of production.

Existing law already supports farm stands operated by our farmers, winery-associated business, and other agritourism where farming is the primary activity on the land. The changes proposed in HB 4153 would damage the existing system and hurt Oregon's farmers, farm support businesses and communities.

We ask you to vote no on HB 4153.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.