

Submitter: Elizabeth Cole-Woodruff
On Behalf Of: Our future
Committee: Senate Committee On Finance and Revenue
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1586

I'm writing as a Washington County resident who cares about what this place will look like not just next year, but when today's kids are raising families here. SB 1586 would reclassify parts of our rural-reserve areas—lands set aside to protect high-value farmland for the long term—and require Washington County and Hillsboro to rezone them for high-tech and advanced manufacturing within six months, with those plan changes automatically acknowledged when adopted. That's a fast, permanent shift away from agriculture on roughly 1,700 acres near Hillsboro.

Rural reserves were created so future generations would still have working farms, healthy soils, and connected open lands—not just more pavement. Those protections were formally recognized in 2011 and rolling them back now means the loss isn't temporary; once fields are graded and built out, we don't get that farmland back.

We're already in an uphill fight on climate and resource strain. Regional reporting ties rapid tech-facility growth to heavy, continuous electricity demand and, in some cases, substantial water use—pressures that make decarbonization and local resilience harder, not easier. Even though SB 1586 limits stand-alone data centers on these parcels, the broader pattern of large tech facilities still raises the same questions: are we trading irreplaceable soils and watershed benefits for uses that push our grid and water systems while offering relatively little, long-term employment per acre?

Another piece that worries me is the semiconductor research tax credit. The bill changes apply to tax years beginning in 2027 and extend to 2036, so any broader community benefit would unfold slowly—over nearly a decade—and it's uncertain how much of that would reach everyday residents. Research credits primarily support corporate R&D, not direct community spending, so their effects often take years to show up locally. Meanwhile, land conversion happens immediately, and the farmland loss is permanent. It feels like instant environmental loss in exchange for financial incentives that may or may not trickle into our community years from now.

On the jobs question, the numbers we keep seeing for data-center operations are striking, often just a few dozen permanent roles for very large sites. That's a small, ongoing jobs footprint compared to the land consumed and the foregone agricultural and ecological value. Advanced manufacturing can bring more jobs than data centers, but the scale of farmland's loss is still out of balance with the long-term environmental costs and the multi-generational value of local agriculture. And yes, the bill states no "stand alone" data centers but, how long till that is amended?

For me, this comes down to what we hand off. Farmland isn't empty space—it's food, local livelihoods, carbon-rich soil, cleaner water, habitat for pollinators, and a landscape that belongs to the next generation as much as ours. Converting protected acres so quickly—and making those changes effectively irreversible—might grow the industrial map, but it shrinks our shared environmental future.

Thank you for considering a resident and Washington county business owners' perspective. I love this county, and I want its next generation to inherit more options, not fewer.