

Submitter: Elaine Stewart
On Behalf Of: SWCD Board of Directors
Committee: Senate Committee On Finance and Revenue
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1586

The elected Board of Directors of the Tualatin Soil and Water Conservation District is opposed to SB 1586. This rural reserve is prime farmland, class 1 and 2 soils. These are the soils that SB 100 was designed to protect when it became law in 1973. They are not just some of the best in Oregon, they are some of the best soils in the world. If they are developed, they are gone forever from food production. Governments can designate other industrial land but they cannot make more prime farmland – the supply is finite.

This is the latest in a series of attempts in the last decade to take this acreage out of farm production. We are very concerned about the lack of public process in and lack of consideration for those affected by this proposal, including the blindness to impacts on businesses outside Hillsboro's urban growth boundary. Agriculture is Oregon's second largest industry and our Washington County agriculture support businesses are a hub for farmers from southwest Washington to the Oregon coast and to Marion County. Every time acreage is removed from production, it places farmers and support businesses in Washington County and the larger region at greater risk.

As a non-regulatory agency working to conserve soil, water, wildlife habitat and other natural resources in Washington County, we can speak to the value of prime farmland without irrigation. Some of you have been told that lack of irrigation makes prime farmland less valuable. On the contrary, it produces a variety of crops, including wheat, oats, and clover. Much of it is also suitable for hazelnuts which are easily grown without irrigation. Grass seed is less valuable as a cash crop than some, but is an important crop rotation to help build organic matter, improve soil health, and keep the land productive for future generations. We encourage people who question the value of unirrigated prime farmland to speak with a farmer.

The Board of Directors of the Tualatin SWCD urges you to reject SB 1586 and respect Oregon's land use law and prior agreements. Please end Hillsboro's attempt to violate them and to destroy additional prime farmland. We will not support any version of this bill that removes the rural reserve designation for this land.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.