

Hello Beth and Rep. Witt:

My wife and I own a 350+ acre farm in Scio, Oregon (Harmony Jack Farms Inc.) and have for about 8 years, advertised in several newspapers and magazines and with friends of family farmers, for people looking for land to farm, in a partnership with us. I can tell you first hand, I have interviewed probably 80 entities (individuals, couples, families), who have responded to those ads. My process is to interview them by phone, and if favorably inclined, bring them to the farm for an on-site visit, where we can get into more detail about their skills, passion / interests, equipment, experience, capital, marketing plan, etc . I get to know a lot about these prospective candidates from the fairly extensive interview. (in my "former life" I was a logistics professional and have been doing interviews throughout most of my career). In this process of discovery (interviewing), it is incredibly consistent how capital and equipment poor most of the applicants are. We have the land, the water, fertility in our soils.... a lot that is ideal for the young farmer. Our partnership structure is established to be fair, and frankly easier than most expect, to become partners here. However, the sticking point is almost always their inability to have "skin in the game" with their own capital (resources) or equipment. They have the passion and often times have invested time, at no or reduced wages, to learn the trade (with an internship at one or more farms), so they even have the experience. They have the expressed will and are wanting to dedicate their time, to making farming their career and business. I can tell you, they need a lift, a break, an angel, or the "aggie bond" program. It would undoubtedly increase the people we would have hired into a partnership on the farm with us. (perhaps it would make this more credible if I explained we currently have about 5 active partnerships going on the farm and room for more. We have 2 livestock partners, a timber harvesting partner, a vegetable partner, a compost and worm castings partner, and an alternative energy (wind turbine) partner on the farm, and there is room for more.... dairy, grain and bean, agri-education/tourism, herbs/flowers, seed production... and more. (this is why we have had so many applicants, as we have "openings" for several businesses that would fit into the collective marketing plan and utilization of the land / farm).

I can personally predict, and tell you as a well documented slice of young farm applicants from our farm, that we would have had more good, local food produced in the Willamette Valley, had the "aggie bond" bill been in place last year. It is my sincere hope that you see the long term benefit to the community of having this program in place. It is needed, and will be helpful as designed. thanks for your consideration.

I do not believe I will be able to testify in person at your hearing, so I hope you will take this email as my opinion and plea, as if I were their in person. thanks again for your consideration.

Andy Westlund

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