

To: The Honorable Rep. Clem, Chair and members of the House Committee on Rural Communities, Land Use and Water
From: Rebecca Landis on behalf of the Oregon Farmers' Markets Association
Re: Testimony for HB 2723

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2723.

I am a past president of Oregon Farmers' Markets Association (OFMA), a membership organization whose mission is supporting local agriculture and healthy communities by strengthening and promoting Oregon's farmers' markets. I advise OFMA on various policy issues.

HB 2723 would build upon work in many localities across the state to foster use of undeveloped land to grow food and other agricultural products. In 2012, for example, both Portland and Corvallis adopted extensive land development code amendments to allow growing and some processing and distribution of agricultural products in a wider range of zones with moderated levels of regulation.

I participated in the Corvallis code revision effort on behalf of small growers in our community, some of whom participate in the Community Table at the farmers' markets I run. My husband and I once fell in this category. For many years we consistently sold more than \$1,000 worth of ag products grown on less than 1/5 of an acre before we bought our farm. (The prize for this achievement is you have to fill out the Census of Agriculture ever five years.)

Oregon communities have derived many benefits from allowing urban land to be cultivated.

Benefits of urban agriculture include:

- Reduced food miles and related fuel use
- Enhanced food security as more residents learn to grow their own food in community gardens or earn income by selling what they grow
- Environmental gains as gardens help clean air and reduce surface temperatures, promote biodiversity and better manage storm water
- Greater community livability and higher property values

The bill allows cities and counties to create zones eligible for tax incentives like those currently found in Exclusive Farm Use zones -- and also for property that qualifies via application as a non-exclusive farm use with two years of production history.

The five-year period specified for landowner agreements in urban agriculture incentive zones strikes a reasonable balance. Five years is a serious commitment by landowners that will provide some security for lessees who work to improve the soil. It does not guarantee any particular lessee access for the full five years, and landowners happily would accept the tax penalties of disqualification if a lucrative development presented itself. In cases where the landowner is a committed grower, we might see some applications for a second five-year period.

Even in times of economic recovery, there are many people who are food insecure and many vacant lots that could use a verdant makeover.

HB 2723 will not force any local government to create zones, and the agreements are initiated by property owners. So it's likely urban agriculture will bloom where it is wanted.

Not every piece of vacant urban land is suitable for small-scale agricultural production. In case this comes up in other testimony, I don't think HB 2723 should attempt to address soil testing and remediation/removal, which are the responsibility of growers regardless of what zoning applies.

We should not assume all urban soil is bad. Cities are where they are for reasons that include proximity to rivers that brought valuable mineralization and fertility to nearby soils.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of this bill.