

Testimony in Support of HB 2723 from Rockwood Urban Farm

Rockwood Urban Farm is a diverse, direct-market enterprise raising vegetables, cut flowers, some nursery stock and seeds in East Portland. Our business is registered with the State of Oregon and licensed by the Department of Agriculture. My partner Ryan Miller and I are entering our third year as owner/operators but this is my 11th growing season in western Oregon. The farm is a total of 2.5 acres comprised of 3 separate plots located in Multnomah County. We currently have a 50-member community supported agriculture program and sell our produce to local restaurants and chefs. We wholesale our flowers to local floral designers and also sell them directly to the public via farm stand and u-cut channels.

I believe our farm is a perfect example of one that would greatly benefit from the passing of HB 2723. We lease one acre located at 13925 SE Stark Street from an older couple in the neighborhood, Gene & Sharon Applegate. We have a 3-year lease and are paying \$4100 for the acre this year. In 2014 the Applegate property taxes alone were \$2322. This land cost is a significant operating expense for us and very high compared to the cost of the acre we lease in Orient, Oregon, which is part of East Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District's farm incubator project. We are paying \$300 for this acre in 2015 and in two years will pay \$600 for the Orient acre, the average cost of an acre per year in the area.

The Applegates have agrarian roots and were compelled by the notion of urban agriculture and seeing their land productive that swayed them to lease to us. The soil is a rich silt-loam that was enhanced by years of its former resident flocks of sheep. It is truly an oasis in our neighborhood full of underserved populations and low-income, high-density housing. This property is flanked by a hot-rod shop, a nurse training center, a junk hauling business, an apartment complex and several homes. While the Applegates are supportive of urban agriculture, they are also business-minded. They receive offers on a regular basis from developers and other businesses seeking to pave the land to sell used cars for example.

I've discussed the idea of seeking a farm deferral with my landlords but the penalty of owing back taxes eliminates this as a viable option. If HB 2723 becomes law, my landlords would certainly take advantage of the reduction in taxes and pass those savings on to us with a reduced lease rate. Our farm would become more profitable and having the security of a 5-year lease would help us to hone our markets and plan for a land transition in the future if necessary. Farming is risky business and I believe these risks are amplified in an urban setting with high property taxes and development pressure.

Multnomah County already acknowledges urban agriculture through recent changes in zoning code allowing for market gardens in residential areas, as well as encouraging access to healthy, locally grown food. Complimentary policy from the state seems like a logical next step to not only acknowledge but encourage urban agriculture, food security and vibrant local communities.

As I understand it, the intent of this bill is to not affect urban growth boundaries and/or result in a conversion of farmland outside of the UGB.

I urge you to vote in favor of HB 2723 and I thank you for the opportunity to add my comments to the record.

Sincerely,

Leah Rose Rodgers
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