

Testimony in opposition to SB 716

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Aaron Nichols

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Washington County



Hello and thank you for your time and for letting me speak here. My name is Aaron Nichols and I'm a co-owner of Stoneboat Farm. We are a thirty acre vegetable farm in Helvetia, just north of Hillsboro. We are directly threatened by SB 716 and the uncertainty it will cause in our business planning.

Senate Bill 716 which would allow counties, including Washington County, to undo a reasonable planning process that set aside industrial land for the cities and ensured long-term farm land in rural areas. Last year thousands of acres were added to Washington county urban growth boundaries. I drive by a few hundred of these when I leave the farm - so far there is no sign of large lot industrial development. I have however watched good farm land turned into an isolated but very large housing development.

A little bit about myself and why I oppose this measure. My brother and I run a vegetable farm in Helvetia, about ten minutes outside of Hillsboro. We moved our operation from Forest Grove last year and are still growing into our thirty acres. However, at less than half capacity this year, we will still employ about three people over the summer and the land provides a full time job for both my brother and me. We spend tens of thousands of dollars in local businesses each year as we grow our farm and invest in our land. We do all of this expecting that our farm can remain in farm country for many years to come - the investment in poultry processing infrastructure, washing stations, and the huge investment in the land would be lost should this land be opened up to Hillsboro development.

I oppose this measure because it replaces a reasonable and public process that created the urban and rural reserves with a legislative work around that few people will know about. If the legislature overrides these local, and supposedly long term, decisions it adds a great deal of uncertainty to our business planning and the long term survival of the rural businesses around us.

I don't oppose industrial development inside the growth boundaries. We sell to Intel and other large lot industrial enterprises. I know that our customers' employees and their kitchens appreciate that their food can come from so close by. I know that the urban/rural relationship this allows creates a better quality of life for both sides. I don't believe that Washington County needs more industrial land at this point. We need better planning and more money to properly develop the many acres added to the UGBs last year. With the current boundaries we can develop high quality industrial sites and keep our high quality farm land that helps serve those sites. Right now, as we add more land to the UGBs, it seems that all that can actually get developed are low quality and isolated housing.

I encourage you to stop this bill from progressing out of the committee and help keep our business and the businesses we depend on alive.

Thank you for your time.