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## **Testimony in Opposition to HB 2666 House Rural Communities, Land Use and Water Committee**

Chair Clem, members of the Committee:

Friends of Family Farmers submits this testimony in opposition to HB 2666 because it would give mining for aggregate on high value farmland in the Willamette Valley precedence over agricultural uses.

Already, without HB 2666 in place, mining for aggregate is a major threat to high value farmland in the Willamette Valley. When it occurs, mining for aggregate takes top quality food producing land permanently out of production, negatively impacting neighboring farms and rural communities.

In many ways, HB 2666 appears to be a solution in search of a problem intended to add even greater advantage for proposals for aggregate mining on farmland than what currently exists. Since 1994, of 359 decisions on aggregate mines on Exclusive Farm Use (EFU) land in Oregon, only 11 were denials, an approval rate of 97%. Despite Oregon's otherwise strong land use system, agriculture often gets the short end of the stick when gravel mines on farmland are proposed. Currently, approximately 400 acres of high quality farmland are lost each year to aggregate mining. Aggregate mines are incompatible with agriculture, with the potential to disrupt groundwater supplies, kick up crop-damaging dust, and generate heavy truck traffic on rural roads. Such activity shouldn't be allowed on Oregon's best farmland.

HB 2666 would make it significantly harder for farmers to prove a proposed mine would impact farming activities, and make it more difficult for state agencies to impose appropriate restrictions on proposed mining activities. Under HB 2666, only farms within 1500 feet of a proposed mine could challenge a proposal, much less than current rules allow. Additionally, farmers would have to prove a mine would make their business 'economically infeasible', a much higher standard than under current law.

Under HB 2666, while local governments could put some limits on mining activities to protect neighbors, these local limits could not 'adversely impact the economic viability' of the mine, essentially putting mining activities above local concerns in almost all cases.

Current law requires proposed gravel mines on designated agricultural land meet criteria on the impacts to ground water, nearby farms, noise, pollution, traffic and other issues. HB 2666 would essentially place gravel mining above farm uses on land designated for agriculture. Farmers would have to go through great expense to stop the damage from proposed gravel mines near their operations, with a much lower likelihood of success than is currently the case.

We have reviewed an outline of a proposed amendment to HB 2666. Unfortunately, as of an hour before its scheduled hearing today, this amendment was not yet available. Based on the potential amendment outline we reviewed, it appears that the changes to HB 2666 would be insignificant and many of the same problems would exist.

Therefore, we urge your opposition to HB 2666 and the proposed amendment.