



**Oregon Farm Bureau Testimony on HB 4079
House Committee on Rural Communities, Land Use, and Water
February 8, 2016**

Oregon Farm Bureau Opposes HB 4079

Chair Clem and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on HB 4079, one of several affordable housing bills up this session. While Oregon Farm Bureau (OFB) is very supportive of ensuring affordable housing for Oregonians, we oppose any attempts to weaken Oregon's land use laws, which exist to ensure orderly and logical development in urban areas and protect agricultural lands from the effects of unplanned development.

By way of background, the OFB is a voluntary, grassroots, nonprofit organization representing Oregon's farmers and ranchers in the public and policymaking arenas. As Oregon's largest general farm organization, its primary goal is to promote educational improvement, economic opportunity, and social advancement for its members and the farming, ranching, and natural resources industry as a whole. Today, OFB represents over 7,000 member families professionally engaged in the industry and has a total membership of over 60,000 Oregon families. OFB has long been one of strongest proponents for land use planning. We were one of the original organizations to champion SB 100, and have been working to ensure the effectiveness of Oregon's land use planning system since its inception.

We are writing today to comment on HB 4079, a bill which impacts Oregon's urban growth boundary (UGB) expansion process. While the UGB expansion process has long been one of the most contentious elements of Oregon's land use planning system, the current process contains important provisions that ensure that there is a need present before expansion can occur and that development is slated on the lowest priority lands. While we appreciate the bill's protection of high-value agricultural land, OFB is concerned about the provisions of HB 4079 that allow for UGB expansion without an evaluation of the need for new buildable land and without following the priority of lands hierarchy currently provided for in the land use process. These processes provide important protections for agricultural land. Without them, Oregon risks creating unnecessary and unplanned development on agricultural lands, which can never be reclaimed once they are developed.

Oregon's agriculture industry is the second largest industry in Oregon. Agriculture is economically linked to approximately 13.2 percent, or \$50 billion, of all Oregon sales and 10.6 percent, or \$22.9 billion, of Oregon's net state product. We provide 326,617 full and part-time jobs in Oregon. However, with Oregon's population growth and the increase of nonconforming uses in agricultural areas, Oregon

producers have increasingly had to produce Oregon's food and fiber on less land. The pressure of urban growth is particularly felt by those who farm and ranch near urban areas. While we support vibrant rural and urban communities, we need to ensure that our communities are investing in the infrastructure and services needed to maximize their potential and avoid sprawl onto rural farmland.

OFB is concerned that the lack of sideboards on urban growth boundary expansion would enable cities to expand without regard for need and regardless of whether they have current buildable land that is not being utilized. These bills could incentivize the pilot cities to avoid properly zoning residential lands for the densities and types of housing needed, because they know they can just expand their boundaries under the guise of affordable housing. Further, logic would dictate that affordable housing should be located closer to urban centers, with adequate access to public transportation and infrastructure, not on the outside of cities where it is unlikely that the city will invest in the infrastructure and public services needed to ensure that the available housing is truly affordable.

OFB is concerned that relaxing land use laws in an attempt to facilitate housing will only result in urban sprawl into rural areas. If the pilot cities are not required to use the priority of lands hierarchy, it could also result in some of Oregon's farmland – that which the state has a statutory duty to protect – being developed for housing. This increased sprawl will result in increased conflicts with agricultural uses, as lands can be developed without regard for the existing agricultural uses in an area.

Oregon Farm Bureau urges you to oppose any affordable housing proposals that allow for development in rural area without adequate analysis of priority of lands prior to urban growth boundary expansion. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.

If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Mary Anne Nash at maryanne@oregonfb.org or 541-740-4062.