

Executive Summary:

We want to share our story as rural landowners trying to resolve a land use violation complaint involving a previously existing “ADU-like” structure, as well as the very positive experiences we have had as Airbnb hosts of a farm-stay B&B small rural enterprise. Operating our small farmstead on rural residential land (1.7 acres of 4.7 acres are in non-EFU farm tax deferral) is Ray’s full-time occupation and a part-time, second occupation / hobby for Mark and our daughter (8th grader).

Oregon’s land use laws basically forbid renting a 2nd “dwelling” unit as a farm-stay B&B, and it seems that practically the only way to have a farm-stay B&B in Oregon’s rural areas is to move out of your farm’s house in order to rent it out.

Shouldn’t Oregonians and our vitally important tourists have the option of a farm-stay B&B experience, as is commonly provided on farmlands in European countries? This would be a win-win option for both farming families and tourism in our state, and to this end we want to enthusiastically support HB 2937 and 2938.

Background:

Who we are: Mark Tesauro is testifying for he and his spouse Ray Friedmann. We moved to Oregon in 1999 when Mark changed employers in the tech sector. We adopted our daughter while living in Washington County and were married (in British Columbia) in the same year, 2003.

Our “DIY” attitudes and passion for quality food and wine inspired us to purchase and move to a 4.7 acre, Multnomah County Rural Residential property in 2004 even when the existing structures and property had been long neglected and were in very poor condition. Along with much help from family and friends we have worked hard to turn this property around into a small family farmstead operation which includes an orchard, half-acre vineyard, 4 hive honey bee apiary, vegetable garden / greenhouse, and housing / pasture / runs for raising poultry, pigs and goats. Our farmstead supplies most of our family’s food and wine, with excess produce either sold or donated to the nearby Linnton food bank. Surplus eggs, honey, goats and grown hogs are sold for profit. In 2015 after 5 years of meeting the farm income test 1.7 acres were transferred from forest to farm deferral.

In May of 2015 we started renting our “guest quarters” space through Airbnb when it was vacant, and found that a small-scale, farm-stay B&B was extremely popular with tourists as well as (surprisingly) visitors from the metro area who wanted an affordable “staycation” break out in the beautiful Oregon countryside. Meeting and hosting so many wonderful people who appreciated what we were doing turned out to be a much more rewarding and fulfilling experience for us than we would have ever imagined. It seemed like an incredible win-win experience – even for Multnomah County (guest taxes collected were comparable to our property taxes).

In the Fall of 2015 after returning from a Vancouver Island trip we had a certified letter waiting for us with a land use complaint / violation threatening us with up to \$3500 of fines per day. We were both shocked and frightened – hiring a lawyer for some initial guidance, since fines that high would bankrupt our family. After great stress, anger, sadness and sleepless nights we entered into a voluntary compliance program, completed a pre-filing meeting and spent months completing what we think are all the requirements to get retroactive permits issued just to keep the outbuilding structure from being destroyed.

Our Positive Farm-Stay B&B Experiences:

When we lived in Europe & traveled we fell in love with farm-stay B&B's and were excited to provide others the same, great & memorable experiences which we had enjoyed. What began as an idea to earn a little bit of money from rooms which were not being used became a very meaningful and fulfilling part of our lives, and of the many very satisfied guests which we hosted.

We were initially concerned about ill-behaved guests, but found that the host / guest review process and disclosure used by Airbnb kept folks on their best behavior. We had no problems with people following the “house rules” we defined. Our home and shop are in a forested hillside area and are not visible to our neighbors. Those neighbors who knew about our B&B activities reacted positively to it.

Benefits we have experienced as Airbnb hosts:

Social Isolation: Living in a rural area can be socially isolating for those who stay “on the farm.” Interesting and diverse guests provide frequent, on-site, healthy social interaction - known to be critical to maintaining health and cognitive function as people age.

Rural Life Education: Demographics and democracy has meant that more and more rural policy is being decided by urban residents (an increasing majority in the state). Farm-stay experiences are a critical outreach that educates urban residents about the value and unique challenges of rural life and agriculture. This will lead to better informed voting decisions that appropriately preserve and protect rural areas.

Transportation: The vast majority of our guests made one car trip out and one car trip back during each day of their stay. Outbound & inbound trips were almost always after morning & evening peak traffic (these are vacationing people, after all). A few made 2 outbound and 2 inbound trips on some days (came back & went out for dinner). This travel is roughly equivalent to having a spouse or child decide to work off-site or participate in after-school activities, and is less impactful than the travel increase caused by having teen children become teen drivers.

Low-Impact Employment: Operating this one room B&B provided the equivalent income of a part-time job away from home. This was basically “trip-neutral” employment, because instead of commuting somewhere else, the “work” drove to and from our

residence. An added benefit is that the car travel done by guests is nearly all outside rush hour times. Commuting would most-likely involve travel during rush hour times.

Additionally, our daughter was able to earn money during her summer break without car travel by helping to clean the apartment after guests departed, and occasionally earned tips for acting as a great farmstead tour guide.

Community Benefits for Urban Areas: Just as we enjoy occasional trips to the city, about 15% of our guests were folks from the Portland/Vancouver metro area who could enjoy an affordable country getaway only a short drive from home. Opportunities like this clearly enhance the larger urban/rural community.