



## TESTIMONY

### House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

April 4, 2017

### Oregon Farm Bureau Supports HB 3050

Chair Clem and Members of the Committee:

The Oregon Farm Bureau Federation (OFB) respectfully asks the Committee to support HB 3050, which would require solar companies to demonstrate there are not other lands available before they can site solar fields on high value farmland.

By way of background, OFB is Oregon's largest grassroots agriculture association, representing 7,000 farming and ranching families across the state. Our mission is to promote educational improvement, economic opportunity, and social advancement for our members and the farming, ranching, and natural resources industry as a whole.

**Solar Companies are looking to Farmland.** In the last several years, we have seen an increase in solar projects on high-value farmland in Oregon. With the new renewable portfolio standard in 2016, we have heard reports of all farmers in a certain area getting mass mailings from solar companies seeking to lease their land for solar projects. Concerns over the growing impact of solar facilities on farmland lead the Oregon Farm Bureau to pass a policy in 2016 opposing the siting of non-agricultural solar panel facilities on high-value soils if alternative sites are available.

Current law allows for the siting of solar projects on high value farmland, with acreage limitations from 12 to 300 acres depending on the type of land where the facility is proposed. We are concerned about the impact of these projects on the agricultural land base in Oregon. Allowing certain non-agricultural uses on farmland can drive up land prices, impact neighboring operations, and impact the overall stability of the land use pattern across the region. In Oregon, we are blessed with some of the nation's most productive farmland, which is the driver of Oregon's second largest economic sector. Agriculture contributes an estimated \$50 billion dollars to the state's economy, and is the lifeblood of Oregon's rural communities.

**An Alternatives Analysis is Appropriate.** While Oregon Farm Bureau supports green energy, we think that it is appropriate to require an alternatives analysis before solar projects may be sited on high value farmland. This approach has worked well in the wind energy sector to strike the balance between protecting Oregon's best farmland, while

supporting the renewable energy sector. This approach would generally require solar facilities to be sited away from high value farmland, but allows for the siting on high value farmland if, among other things, the project is locationally dependent or there are not sites available that are not high value. We think this strikes the appropriate balance between protecting farmland, while allowing solar development if there are not alternative sites available.

We urge you to help protect Oregon's most productive soils, and require an Alternatives analysis for siting solar facilities on high value farmland. Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on HB 3050. We hope you will support this legislation.

Please contact Mary Anne Nash at [maryanne@oregonfb.org](mailto:maryanne@oregonfb.org) with any questions.