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April 17, 2017

House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Testimony on HB 2023

Chair Clem and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 2023, a bill amending the definition of high-value farmland. 1000 Friends of Oregon is a nonprofit, membership organization that works with Oregonians to support livable urban and rural communities; protect family farms, forests and natural areas; and provide transportation and housing choice.

At the outset we would like to acknowledge the hard work and outreach that has gone into finding a workable solution on this bill. However, we do not believe the current version of the bill (-4 amendments) should move forward for the following reasons. HB 2023 changes the definition of high-value farmland in order to allow Umatilla Electric Cooperative to more easily site solar arrays in Umatilla County. Although we are generally supportive of well-placed renewable energy development, we are concerned that this bill will unintentionally change the siting standards for solar development. Further the bill's exemption for lands inside an irrigation district boundary is too broad.

Oregon's high-value farmland a prized, unique and irreplaceable resource. We are concerned that this bill is a solution without a problem. There is already a process in place (the exceptions process) that UEC can go through to site its facilities if it chooses to do so on high-value farmland. UEC has already successfully utilized this process for one solar project. Further, we have consistently encouraged LCDC and DLCD to revisit solar rules so they better address these issues. While we understand the intent of the bill, we cannot support in its current form.

Respectfully submitted,

Meriel L. Darzen
Circuit Rider Staff Attorney