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June 27, 2017

Representative Brad Witt, Co-Chair
Senator Lew Frederick, Co-Chair
and Members of the Joint Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Natural Resources
900 Court St. NE, H-174
Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: HB 3249, Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program

Dear Co-Chairs Witt and Frederick, and Members of the Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 3249, a bill that would enhance Oregon's agricultural economy by creating new mechanisms for protecting Oregon's agricultural lands and by providing ongoing support for the families engaged in farming in Oregon. 1000 Friends of Oregon is a nonprofit, membership organization that works with Oregonians to support livable urban and rural economies; protect family farms, forests and natural areas; and provide transportation and housing choice.

Agriculture is the second largest sector of Oregon's economy, supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs in both rural and urban areas and in every corner of the state.¹ Oregon's agricultural sector is diverse, it feeds Oregonians, it brings money into the state from exports, and the jobs it creates cannot be outsourced to other states or other parts of the world. This combination of factors combined to help the agricultural sector remain strong and growing during the most recent recession, even as other sectors declined.

The long-term health of this economic engine depends in large part on a continued supply of the right types of land in the right places. While the land is essential, it is not enough in and of itself: the future also depends on the financial success of the families that own and operate the vast majority of farms in the state. The programs that will be put in place with passage of HB 3249 will provide willing landowners new tools to help them preserve not only their land but their farm businesses.

There is no question that Oregon's land use program has been instrumental in dramatically slowing the conversion of agricultural lands to other uses. However, even with this program in place every year we lose more agricultural land to development, conversion to other uses, or conflicts due to uses allowed on neighboring properties.² HB 3249 would put in place a voluntary framework where willing property owners could take advantage of existing federal funds to place working lands covenants or easements on their own land and provide longer term assurances that it will remain available for agricultural production in the future. The funds that come to the farmers through these

¹ See 1000 Friends of Oregon, *Great and Growing: People and Jobs in Oregon's Agri-Cluster*, November, 2013.

² See Department of Land Conservation and Development, *2014-2015 Oregon Farm and Forest Report*, January, 2017.

Co-Chairs Brad Witt and Lew Frederick

June 27, 2017

Page 2 of 2

transactions can then be reinvested in their farming businesses and be used to increase the quality of life for Oregon's farm families.

Under this bill the financial and conservation benefits of easements will be paired with another tool to help Oregon's farm families succeed in the future. As a founding member of the Oregon Community Food Systems Network, we have been an active partner with about a dozen other organizations that have been investigating the barriers to entering the farming profession in Oregon. Among the more significant findings of that work are the fact that as much as two-thirds (10.45 million acres) of Oregon's agricultural lands are likely to change hands the next 20 years, and up to 80 percent of Oregon's farm businesses may not have succession plans in place.³

The average age of farmers in Oregon is now about 60 years. As those farmers retire or die their lands will be transferred at an unprecedented rate into the hands of others. Lands that must be sold quickly as a result of an unplanned estate are increasingly bought for non-farm uses to investors who may be holding the land for future development and who are less likely than resident owners to contribute to the well-being of surrounding rural communities.

HB 3249 would provide critical resources to help Oregon's farm families and the rural communities that depend on them in this time of significant transition. The Farm and Ranch Succession planning assistance to be offered through OSU Extension's Ties to the Land program will help Oregon's farm and ranch families prepare for those transitions and understand the full suite of opportunities to help them not only protect their land but to pass on viable businesses to the next generation of farmers.

1000 Friends of Oregon supports passage of HB 3249, and urges the Subcommittee to do the same.

Thank you for your consideration,



Greg Holmes

Food Systems Program Director

³ See Oregon State University, Portland State University, and Rogue Farm Corps, *The Future of Oregon's Agricultural Land*, 2016.