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March 12, 2019

Helping to shape the use of our natural resources to protect the quality of life in Yamhill County.

House Committee on Agriculture and Land Use
State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97901

RE: Testimony in Support of HB 2790

Chair Clem and members of the Committee:

Friends of Yamhill County works to protect natural resources through the implementation of land use planning goals, policies, and laws that maintain and improve the present and future quality of life in Yamhill County for both urban and rural residents. We support HB 2790.

Mass gatherings are often sited on farmland, yet the current law does not provide for consideration of impacts to surrounding farmers. Counties need the ability and flexibility to consider land use impacts from these gatherings and to collect adequate permitting fees. Public resources are overstretched by uncharacteristic traffic on rural road, demand for emergency services in large assemblies in remote locations, and a lack of staff to review insurance policies.

In Yamhill County we have not seen events on the scale of some other counties. However, we have had experience with event organizers using the outdoor mass gathering standards when they have met opposition or been unable to comply within the agritourism standards. It is not sensible to site these activities on farmland when there are other venues, like fair grounds, within the range of public services. In our experience the property owner was left with damage, disruption (their own animals) and deteriorated relationships with neighbors to the extent that they severed their relationship with the organizer. Absentee owners are less likely to have this sense of community.

Mass gatherings are land uses. They often recur year after year or at repeated intervals through the spring and summer months. In addition to traffic of those paying to attend, the extensive set-up and break-down times congest rural road and interfere with farm equipment at the height of their work season. They can have year-round impacts when water supplies are compromised, and the soil is compacted and otherwise degraded. Our changing rain and temperature patterns are increasing the stress on our farms – and farmers – and raising the fire risk throughout much of the state.

This bill clarifies jurisdictional issues so that appeals of mass gatherings go to LUBA instead of the Circuit Court which has no land use experience or expertise. We strongly urge support of HB 2790 to provide meaningful planning and oversight of outdoor mass gatherings. This is necessary to protect our agricultural lands, support the work of our rural public life safety professionals, as well as ensure the safety and well-being of those who would attend events.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Kathryn Jernstedt

Kathryn Jernstedt
President
Friends of Yamhill County

Cc: Representative Ron Noble
Senator Brian Boquist

HB 2790 FYC