

Chairs Johnson, Steiner-Hayward, Rayfield

My name is John O'Keeffe, I am a life long third generation rancher, actively helping the fourth generation build a better ranch, and helping create a place for the fifth generation to continue this challenging and rewarding lifestyle.

Thanks for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB5555.

Conservation easements are not going away. It is extremely important that we provide support for a working lands approach to conservation easements. Conservation easements have broad application, the easements developed by pure conservation organizations may not serve farmers and ranchers as well as easements designed to be working land easements.

It is extremely important that we get Oregon on equal footing with other states to use the federal funding available for these programs. Many states take full advantage of the federal match funds available, Oregon does not, SB5555 would provide a mechanism to match federal funds.

The rules and commission for Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program are all in place, developed by a very thoughtful and well vetted process in 2017, it is time to fund this and move forward.

Farmland has become too expensive for starting farmers to purchase with the proceeds from production. Foreign or domestic investors are becoming a factor in agricultural real estate. The programs supported by SB5555 give producers tools that they can use to offset these outside influences in agricultural real estate.

Rural economies are challenged, SB5555 helps rural producers help themselves while they are also helping to feed the world.

Generational transfer is a huge challenge in Agriculture, those active in agriculture continue to get older, anything we can do to get and keep young people in agriculture will pay off big in the future. SB5555 funds programs that address these issues.

Please support SB5555, thank you for your consideration.