

Save Helvetia is a farmland preservation organization that works to protect the farm and forestlands in Washington County. Helvetia is far from Malheur County: why are we stepping into this? It is because our land use laws, procedures and precedents constitute a shared, common treasure that belong to all of the people of the entire State of Oregon. SB 16 asks the Legislative Assembly to act as a real estate broker, carving out CEO farmsteads as a lure for economic development. This at a time when Malheur County has formally determined to explore linkage with the State of Idaho. Malheur County and City of Ontario could find other means to attract development without violating our state treasure. Lands are available within Ontario's UGB. Ontario and Malheur County could develop a package of incentives to attract business that don't checkerboard the range and farm lands. Inside the city, CEOs would be more likely to become a valuable part of civic life. 100 CEO farmsteads would require access roads and easements, 100 wells and 100 septic systems, with hundreds of opportunities for fires to break into the range and farm lands. Will these farmsteads morph into short term rentals or second homes? The bill provides no guardrails. Are there criteria for how many jobs are brought in and how long they would be retained? The bill lacks specificity to its aim. Conflicts arise when residences are located in proximity to farming: dust, noise, herbicides, pesticides, pollen, dogs chasing cattle, coyote taking pets, among others. As we strive for increased equity in policy making, this is a throwback to passing a law for an elite few at the expense of many. Upon passage, developers would perceive a new opening in their strategies to move into farm and forestlands. Please don't take the barn door off or leave the pasture gate open.