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June 21, 2023

House Committee on Rules
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Vote “NO” on SB 70 A – Housing on High-Value Farmland

Amends definition of high-value farmlands for residential rezoning of lands within Eastern Oregon Border Economic Development Region

To: House Committee on Rules

Dear Chair Fahey, Vice-Chair Breese-Iverson, Vice-Chair Kropf, and Members of the Committee;

Friends of Marion County (FoMC) is an independent 501(c)(3) farmland protection organization founded in 1998. Our mission is to protect farm and forestland, parks, and open space.

There are so many reasons the committee should reject this proposal and I will list just a few here.

1. SB 16 passed the legislature in 2021 with the understanding that the bill protects high-value farmland. Proponents claim legislative support however the vote taken was actually very close. Senate Vote AYE = 16 NAY = 12, House Vote AYE = 32 NAY = 27.

2. We have come to understand from the proponents that SB 70 A now “fixes” SB 16 to permit housing on high-value farmland since the farmland proposed for housing is available in areas that are not considered appealable to developers. The proponents call this high-value farmland “nonviable”.

3. SB 70 A does not “fix” a problem but expands the locations available for housing on farmland that should be protected, i.e., viticultural areas, irrigation districts, etc.

4. The 2021 legislature narrowly voted for SB16 with the understanding that only “scrub land” unsuitable for farming would be affected.

5. So why are the proponents supporting SB 70 A? The answer is clearly that SB 70 A gives developers more high-value farmland on which to build unaffordable housing.

I hope this letter provides an important view of the proposal and that the House Committee on Rules should reject this measure.

Thank you for listening.

Roger Kaye, President
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