

Members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources:

My name is Anna Jesse. I am a 3rd generation farmer and conservationist working on my family's farm - Forest Hills Farms, Inc. - in Cornelius, Washington County. I am a proud Oregonian with a deep love for the natural diversity of our state. When I speak today, please consider not only what is best for people, but what is best for the land itself.

If you have ever been outside of Oregon, or even along one of its borders, it's hard not to see big differences in the landscape. The reason for that is our land use laws. They keep the sprawl from taking over, protect our exceptionally unique natural environments and farmlands, and ultimately show the value that Oregonians place in the land they live on. Every time we make an exception to those land use laws, we are degrading their effectiveness as well as the land and people that they impact. I am asking you to vehemently oppose SB 70.

Consider this: In the 60's and 70's when guys like Dick Erath and David Lett started planting wine grapes in the Willamette Valley, people thought they were crazy. Today, Oregon's Willamette Valley is one of the fastest wine growing regions in the world, producing such fine quality that it rivals that of old world France. On sites that were traditionally hard to farm other crops on or didn't generate much margin and were considered to be not-so-high-value farmland, you are now seeing high-value permanent crops. That tough to farm land that no one wanted to deal with is now some of the most expensive farmland in the state. The French have a term called 'terroir' that they use in reference to wine. It means "with a sense of place" and denotes the complete natural environment in which the grapes come from including, soil, topography, climate, etc. I bring this up because wine growing regions, and really any growing region, has its own completely unique set of characteristics. Here in Oregon, we have some of the most interesting and unique terroir in the world, so much that has yet to be explored. Another example of this would be The Rocks District of Milton-Freewater, an AVA famous for the fact that it has little to no top soil but rather baseball sized basalt cobbles. Once an area impossible to farm is now extremely high value agricultural ground producing world-renowned Syrahs. My use of wine grapes as an example denotes the entirety of our dynamic agricultural industry.

When we continue to make exceptions to our land use laws and take farmland out of production, we are being irresponsible and shortsighted. Who knows what will change for that farmland in the next decade or century? In a world of ever evolving technology and knowledge, we are throwing away our potential and giving up. A house doesn't have the kind of needs that agriculture does. As they have developed Intel in Washington County, they have scraped off millions of metric tons of some of the highest value, most fertile soil in the world and dumped it into a rock quarry operating in its reclamation phase. We cannot get that back. While this wouldn't necessarily lead to Intel, it only reminds me that when we give an inch, they'll take a mile. Every single piece of land counts.

Another thing to consider is your agricultural community in Oregon. One of the largest economic drivers in the state and also one of the ones at the highest risk. To continue to take farmland out of production is to put nails in the coffin of Oregon agriculture. Farming is a unique business, asset rich and usually cash poor because farmers are price-takers. Farming and ranching is notoriously hard work, but it produces notoriously resourceful and creative people who have a deep connection and understanding of the land they work and steward. If we support them, they will persevere. Allow us, the agricultural community, the opportunity to carry on the legacy of Oregon's working farmlands, not just for us, but also for the land.

I have family and friends in all types and scales of agriculture across the state. We all have a unique set of challenges based on location and otherwise, but at the end of the day we all want the same thing. We want to see agriculture, the industry this state was founded upon, not only survive in the generations to come, but to thrive. To be a farmer is to love the land, to know it's nuances, and celebrate it for it's generosity and uniqueness. A builder looks at a piece of land and evaluates how easy it will be to build and sell a house. They are not looking at what the land has to offer. They simply want to scrape it all away. Not everyone looks at a piece of land and sees its natural potential, but a farmer does. If we put houses where there should be viable crops, we are not doing our duty as caretakers of our state and as stewards of its land. Land should be managed for its highest and best use. I encourage you all to consider what business professionals call the triple bottom line: profit, people, and planet. The foundational element of success for profit and people is planet. When faced with two choices, agriculture or development, it is clear which is the priority here.

The land we have tells a unique story. It tells the history but it also will tell the future. What kind of a future do you want to be responsible for writing? Development of farmland is simply using the land. Farming of farmland is caring for the land, bettering it to tell a much bigger story, allowing it to develop into its full potential.

Here in Oregon, we have some of the most interesting and unique terroir in the world, so much that has yet to be even explored. We request that the Committee support Oregon agriculture and both the legacy and future of our state by choosing to oppose SB 70.

Thank you for your consideration.

Anna Jesse