



3.17.2023

Chair Ken Helm
House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE, Salem Oregon 97301

Subject: Testimony in Support of House Bill 3575

Thank you, Representative Helm, for sponsoring HB 3575 and appreciation to the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water for holding a hearing on this legislation. My name is BJ Westlund and I am the Government Affairs Manager at Farmers Conservation Alliance, a nonprofit conservation organization with our headquarters located in Hood River. I am writing today on behalf of Farmers Conservation Alliance in support of House Bill 3575 and the amendment from Rep. Helm's office.

Farmers Conservation Alliance, commonly referred to as FCA, is a non-profit organization that works with irrigation districts throughout Oregon to develop and implement irrigation modernization projects that result in multiple benefits for irrigation districts, farmers, watersheds, and local communities. As part of this work, FCA helps irrigation districts apply for funding at both the state and federal level that can be used for a wide range of activities from planning to construction of irrigation modernization projects.

The Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) is one such agency that irrigation districts can turn to for funding. However, OWRD's current system of awarding grant funds on an annual basis is an obstacle that can hinder a district's effort to move projects forward. This is especially true for construction phases of projects because irrigation districts can only implement projects during the irrigation offseason when water is not in the canals. If OWRD does not award funding before the offseason, then districts must delay construction by a whole year.

Historically, FCA has used OWRD funding to help districts perform assessments, stakeholder outreach, and collect data. All this information is vital in the development of irrigation modernization projects. However, opportunities to start this kind of early planning work does not always align with OWRD's annual announcement timeline. This conflict in timing can result in projects being delayed by at least a year if not permanently missing a planning opportunity.

From FCA's experience, these delays are detrimental as it usually results in increased construction costs or missed opportunities to develop modernization projects. In addition, it pushes off the positive benefits that projects produce for irrigation districts, farmers, and

the environment. HB 3575 alleviates these challenges and reduces the impacts of delay by allowing OWRD to award funds twice a year. Rep. Helm's amendment further clarifies the deadlines for when applications need to be submitted for OWRD's consideration. Project pre-planning and coordination are critical for districts, and organizations like FCA, so they know when applications need to be submitted and what time of year their applications will be reviewed.

Thank you for you for reviewing this written testimony. Happy to answer any questions and can be reached via email at BJ.Westlund@fcasolutions.org.