



February 8, 2024

To: Senate Committee on Housing and Development
Re: Opposition to SB 1537

Dear Chair Jama and members of the Committee,

The mission of American Farmland Trust (AFT) is to save the land that sustains us by protecting farmland, promoting sound farming practices, and keeping farmers on the land. AFT would really like to support SB 1537, as it contains many excellent solutions for the housing crisis in Oregon. However, as written, it has a fatal flaw. We urge you to amend SB 1537 to remove the component that bypasses land use law to allow large urban growth boundary (UGB) expansions.

AFT's Farms Under Threat research shows that, between 2001 and 2016, Oregon lost 65,800 acres to urban and low-density residential development. While the statewide planning system has put Oregon at the top in the nation for farmland protection through land use policy, the state still stands to lose another 109,100 acres by 2040 if these development trends persist. However, these trends will be exacerbated and more farmland will be lost under the conditions that SB 1537 will create.

The Legislature should retain the carefully crafted land use laws that only allow UGB expansion when there is a demonstrated need. It should also invest in infrastructure for housing development within existing UGBs so that expansion will not be needed in most communities. SB 1537 could be the bill to accomplish both of these goals. Please support an amendment so that the Legislature can address the housing crisis while retaining the agricultural landscape that makes Oregon a great place to live.

Housing is a critical issue for many Oregon residents. But farmland, and the food systems that it supports, is also critical for a growing population. Let's not pit housing against farmland when both are necessary to support a high quality of life in Oregon.

Sincerely,

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