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Dear Chair Golden, Vice-Chair Nash, and members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on SB 77 and SB 78. I have great concerns about protecting our agricultural lands, forest lands, and rural communities in favor of non-agricultural land developments. Because of my concerns, I urge you to support SB 77 and SB 78. I am a retired O.S.U. Professor of Crop Science and an Oregonian that supports SB 77 and SB 78, which will positively affect agricultural and forest lands by restricting the conversion of these working lands into backdrops for luxury estates and hotels.

I have seen firsthand in my career working with family farmers, and especially new and beginning operators, that they are being priced out by rising land costs. These bills would help close long-abused loopholes that are bad for farmers, rural residents, rural economies, and our state as a whole.

SB 77 addresses the problem of speculative land pricing through abuse of the “home occupations” statute, where the mere opportunity to site luxury hotels, and well-heeled entertainment venues on land designated exclusively for agricultural and forest production is driving up farm and forest land prices beyond the reach of family farmers, ranchers, and timberland managers.

SB 78 deals with a similar issue of speculative land pricing for high-end residential development, fixing misuse of “replacement dwelling” provisions, while protecting the ability for homeowners in farm and forest zones to replace an old home lost to natural disaster or decay. This helps stop conversion of thousands of acres of farm land into elite residences at the expense of working farmers and timberland managers.

It’s time for our legislature to pay serious attention to Oregon’s farm, range, and forest land. The longer we ignore these issues, the more we do irreparable damage to Oregon’s irreplaceable lands and the families that work hard to feed our communities. Please stop the land speculation and conversion of Oregon’s limited agricultural and forest land by supporting these two bills.

Thank you for considering my comments and allowing this opportunity for public input.

Respectfully,

Daniel A. Ball, Ph.D.