

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

As a resident of Hood River County, thank you for the opportunity to comment on SB 77 and SB 78. I urge you to support these bills. I am an Oregonian who supports SB 77 and SB 78, which will positively affect agricultural and forest lands by course-correcting rural gentrification and displacement that are turning essential working lands that feed our communities and supply our timber into backdrops for luxury estates and hotels.

I witness this first hand in our county, where historic landowners, including farmers, are selling and developing farmland land for residential use. Family farmers, ranchers, and timberland managers – and especially new and beginning operators – are being priced out by rising land costs.

These bills would help close long-abused loopholes that are bad for 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 a home lost to natural disaster or decay. This helps stop conversion of thousands of acres of resource land into elite residences at the expense of working farmers and timberland managers. It’s time for the legislature to again 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 precious resource lands and the families that work hard to feed our communities. Once we lose these lands, we can never go back. Oregon’s farmers, ranchers, and timberland managers deserve better.

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.