

Public Comment in Support of HB 3372

Submitted by: Christopher Peters, Bearfox Farms LLC

Location: Elsie, Oregon

As the owner of a small farm in Elsie, Oregon, I'm writing in strong support of HB 3372. Our farm is located on EFU-zoned land along the Nehalem River, where we receive over 100 inches of rain in the winter and have water flowing past us year-round. Despite this, we are currently unable to obtain legal access to water rights to irrigate our crops.

We operate a dry-farmed, high-density apple orchard and a one-acre market garden. While we do our best to grow within these limitations, the lack of access to irrigation severely limits our farm's ability to serve our community. With water access, we could conservatively produce over 40,000 pounds of fresh, locally grown produce per acre each year. Using modern drip irrigation, our water usage would remain well under 5,000 gallons per day—yet Oregon law currently prohibits any commercial crop irrigation without a formal water right, no matter how minimal the usage.

Under current Oregon exemptions, I could legally irrigate a 1/2-acre lawn or non-commercial garden, or use up to 5,000 gallons per day for other business purposes—but not for growing food to sell. This creates an unfortunate paradox: we can use water for landscaping or livestock, but not to feed our community.

HB 3372 offers a practical, balanced solution. It acknowledges that growing food is one of the most beneficial uses of our shared water resources and gives small farms a path to responsibly use modest amounts of water for irrigation. It supports food security, rural economic resilience, and water efficiency.

I urge you to pass HB 3372 and give Oregon's small farms a fair and sustainable opportunity to grow.

Thank you,
Christopher Peters
Bearfox Farms LLC
Elsie, Oregon