

Testimony in Support of HB 3422 to the House Committee on Climate, Energy and Environment

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Chair Lively, Vice-Chairs Gamba and Levy, Members of the Committee,

We are writing today to urge your support for HB 3422 to ensure the state Energy Facility Siting Council (EFSC) looks at alternatives when considering new large scale energy projects on farmland in Oregon.

We farm and ranch on roughly 70 acres in the Scio area in rural Linn County, raising grass fed beef, hay and vegetables. In 2014, we put up a 10 kW solar array that provides enough power for our home and some farm operations while providing a small income stream. A few years later we installed another 10 kW array that produces roughly 80% of the electricity needed to run our irrigation system. These solar arrays have saved us thousands of dollars over this time, more than paying for themselves in the process. We believe solar, appropriately located, can be a valuable resource to help farmers and ranchers save money, protect against rising electricity prices, and potentially add some income. We understand why it would be tempting for some to seek to develop much larger solar facilities. However, it is clear that covering most or all of a farm's land with a large-scale solar installation would effectively take those lands out of production and be incompatible with many types of farming operations, including ours.

During the election cycle of 2023-2024, we travelled extensively around Linn County talking to voters and meeting people with a wide variety of views. One of the major sources of controversy in rural Linn County over this time has been a very large solar development proposed for land zoned exclusive farm use and wetlands south of Brownsville, the Muddy Creek Energy Park. If built, this first of its kind proposal in the Willamette Valley would cover roughly 2.5 square miles (1600 acres) of working farmland. Concerns about this project include impacts to wildlife, wetlands, fire risk, and the loss of significant areas of productive agricultural land. The feasibility of using sites like this for agrivoltaics - combining solar production with working agriculture - at this very large scale is highly questionable and untested.

As a result, those concerned have been pressing for alternative locations without the same impacts to working farmland and wetlands to be considered. **But the lack of an alternatives analysis in the EFSC siting process has stifled this discussion and created greater backlash and controversy.** The basic idea of an alternatives analysis is that developers and EFSC should be required to look at alternative locations for large energy developments during the planning process, just like counties would have to do.

Adding an alternatives analysis to the EFSC process is a common sense and equitable way to ensure that even as these proposals are developed in Oregon, they are done in a way most compatible with our state's goals of protecting farmland and other natural resource values, while securing greater local buy-in.

Again, we urge your support for HB 3422. Thank you.

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