

I am a fourth generation farmer working to carry on an ever-evolving, diversified operation near Albany. We steward 450 acres of floodplain exclusive farm use (EFU) land along the Willamette river. I've been listening to conversations about the changing agricultural landscape, and what land use planning is, since 2010. I grew up a farmer, have been an entrepreneur, vendor, event host, and continue to be a farmer.

As a farmer, I know everything is connected.

As a farmer, I know that rushing through decisions, and acting from impatience makes more work, and expense, for us later on.

(As a human I also empathize with wanting to break through rigidity. Thanks to the legislators who have been working on this issue. We must remember that polarization is not because only one "side"... and one side getting it's way doesn't truly interrupt the dynamic)

I will focus my comments on 3 areas related to on farm retail expansion:

- **Long-term economic stewardship of the commons, and land access for future generations.**
- **Guiding values for clarity of regulatory goals**
- **Farm impacts**

Economic & long term economic stewardship of the commons, future land access:

What future do we encourage? What sort of "paving the way" is appropriate?

Agricultural land is becoming less available and more expensive, and this is a barrier for folks wanting to secure long-term access to farming as well as farmers who want to expand their farms capacities. Developed infrastructure on farms represents a significant increase in farmland price, and that price is linked to choices that others have made about operations they later sell.

One of the key points of contention in this conversation is what type of infrastructure is appropriate for a farm store.

There is a big difference between 10,000 and 2,500 square feet of building, especially when we include the cost of materials, building to safety codes, and marketing aesthetics to host events. And this matters, when businesses fail, as many start-ups do, or as our elder generation of farmers retire and decide to sell.. what is left behind/put on the market?

A few hundred thousand dollars difference in market price--> makes or breaks a deal for farmers my age and younger who have been working for other people their whole lives.

A few hundred thousand dollars, even per acre, makes much less of a difference to someone who already owns multiple properties and is looking to transfer the money from a recent sale, or have excess capital for speculation.

If you don't relate to this, or if you belittle the consequentiality of it: Are you close with people who don't have family wealth nor the capacity to buy a home? With working class folks? Do you relate with young people growing up today, who will inherit your choices?

The vast majority of my peers who have endeavored to get into farming(not coming from family operations) are interested in growing food, fiber, seeds, and/or pasturing animals and many of them are interested in more people getting outside, observing, learning and eating from the fruits of farmers' labors. It's about food and interdependence, it's about being able to put down long-term roots. These peers are also facing high costs of land, of housing, of rent, and a harder time getting into asset ownership.

We have an aging population and a big shift of land ownership on the horizon. Potential income from farm stores does more to increase land prices than it does to help working people get mortgages... There are ways to write policy that can still provide such pathways of possibility for diversified income streams and protect that access to farming as a way of life.

The next generation is not just the people who own property, or are endeavoring to take their family's farm lineage into the future...the next generation, if it truly thrives, will be the people who learn how to work together, sticking it out until our differences inform rather than impede coherence.

Guiding values for clarity of regulatory goals:

Regulations, ideally, would allow for creativity and vision, while also holding protections for the long-term view beyond any of our individual lives or tenure on the land. And sometimes, having to go through a process can feel daunting, but ideally it front loads intentionality and prevents waste and hazards in the longrun.

I don't think the county needs to see your sales records. And I don't think fungible and irrelevant measures such as what square footage of a building is for what inventory should be the measures of our statutes.

What are we trying to quantify? To encourage?

If our aim is not explicit, it is exploitable.

I care that farmers who want to farm-- with dirt, with animals, with plants--- are not replaced by an elite investor class putting down pavement and selling whitewashed rural experiences.

I care that farmers can farm, and that we are invested in our community, and long-term resilience.

If we are actually looking to encourage this in the long run, rather than arbitrary acreage requirements, retail growth could have thresholds linked to tenure, and community connection. There is a natural vetting in scaling up rather than hitting the ground with a large permanent building (even if you're required to plant an orchard with it).

Let's make a policy standard where the only reasons you actually need worry about being out of compliance is: If you are disregarding your impact on safety, on the surrounding community, and impacts on the future access to the land by the coming generations.

Farm impacts:

I live and work in a neighborhood with 3 different farm stands and 2 pumpkin patches. My family, and a few other people, run a medium sized farm. We use tractors, grow 20+ seed crops, use herbicides, work to restore native plant species, steward forests, wetlands and wildlife habitat...And we have a farm stand where we sell Asparagus and dry beans in the spring, as well as advertise my brother's locker beef.

My mom runs a pumpkin patch in the fall. These are community assets, and community fixtures that a multitude of people enjoy--- more people who pass by on foot and bike than in cars.

One of the neighbors runs a farm stand from her ample garden, on rural residential land. She also hosts seasonal workshops doing wreathmaking and cider pressing. We work together to share resources and she grew her business alongside the awareness of the surrounding farm landscape. If we're waiting for the cows to cross the road, she helps turn traffic around. If I'm backing the combine (seed harvester) out from our seed lot onto the road (as I do frequently in the summer) I also have reasonable trust that her farmstand customers are regulars and know to pay attention coming around the curve where the only thing I can do to mitigate the lack of visibility is drive that large machine very slow.

The farm impacts test is a part of the current agritourism statute as a safeguard that matters to a wide variety of farmers and farm types. Currently, in my community direct informal conversations are sufficient. But what about when investors or people not rooted in their communities look to Oregon agro-tourism as an industry they want to try out? What if a cannabis venture company buys the other EFU parcel nearby, plants some fruit trees and throws up a 10,000 sq foot building to start hosting however many retreats and events they want... if their county permit process does not tell them, it is entirely possible that something they build in the winter could have zero context or consideration to how that road functions during summer harvests.

I saw no discussion in the House committee to indicate that people read the bill far enough to notice the changes to psilocybin and cannabis statutes. Which would expand the new proposed concept of farm stores would be an outright allowed use with no vetting on those as well.

Although we hope people committed to rural living know how important neighbor relations are, considering removing "the good neighbor test" requirement from agrotourism events means that in the future, historic farming operations won't have a mechanism to make sure new operations do their diligence.

The farmers who have built their agritourism operations from scratch over the recent decades have learned, adapted and scaled as fitting to their operations, land, and location.

Starting with tents and mobile structures, scaling up over time, as you learn the land and roads and neighbors is a smart and reasonable thing to consider, that I think could be more clearly permitted and enforced than arbitrary square footage. It could also be an easier way to ensure farm impacts and safety standards work, without being long-term restrictive to operations that find their ways to thrive with agro-tourism.

Closing thoughts:

I'm not worried about strip clubs. I'm not worried about people selling their neighbors artwork and jewelry alongside their beans and squash. I'm worried about land speculation and the furthering of wealth concentration into the hands of investor property owners who already have more than enough, who value profit maximization over being long-term rooted in a community.

It has been obvious to me for years that we need to find a way to re-visit the definitions of farming to include broader land stewardship and the sharing of nature access with more of the public. The seriousness of how these changes and decisions happen cannot be understated. We have magnificent expanses of nature in this state. And we have an erratic economy that has some serious issues and falsehoods.

In the present moment, economic uncertainty across the nation is adding pressure and stress to... every committee I watch in the legislature. The most inspiring things that I have seen therein has been the efforts of land stewards in Eastern Oregon to collaboratively restore aquifers, and the collaborations between tribes and state agencies to work for better wildfire management and response.

What do those efforts have in common?

People coming together to invest in their relationships with the land and communities that are connected to it.

Someday I want the people who work for farms to be able to have enduring access to helping to steward land, where they can invest their sweat and life in something that is both trustably "theirs" and "all of ours".

For this, and other reasons, I find it off base for Oregon Property Owners Association (OPOA, formerly Oregonians in Action) to be the primary driving force behind a bill supposedly about the future of farming. They represent property owners—broadly—and certainly have experience with county regulations that can bring ideas to the conversation. But, just because people are well spoken, care about farmers, and can be in the capital building frequently, doesn't mean they've been around fields very long, or truly understand agriculture beyond the 12 farms they work with.

What about commodity farmers? Production farms?

What about the use of pesticides and heavy machinery and how that interfaces with neighboring farms?

What about farmers on rented ground? Farmers market farmers? Farm-to-school farmers? Food hubs that are already innovating to bring the public and farm direct together in local neighborhoods?

It is a mistake to leave the very real support groups of Friends of Family Farmers and OSU extension out of the legislative vision. And it's also a mistake to spend our precious time and energy running social media fear-mongering campaigns, thinking we have the solution and we already know what some groups' gripe is, or that their realities don't matter.

There is a demand for an agritourism /destination farms, near Portland, and that the citizen patrons of those submitted some testimony in support HB 4153A. And legislators also need to acknowledge that a 70% majority of testimony on that bill was opposed.

There are so many ways to farm, and to be in relationship with land and soil and place.

Leaning too heavily towards one side has not solved this in the past, and there are more than two sides to this issue.

With care,
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