

Submitter: Mickey Willenbring

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4153

As a small business owner and rancher who is currently navigating the process of opening a farm stand, I oppose this HB 4153 not only because it forces small businesses like mine to compete with corporate interests, but also because it increases risks and potentially costs such as insurance to neighboring farms and ranches. When a bill such as this deregulates and loosens restrictions not only on the products but also on the events which can take place on EFU lands, it opens the gates for a number of unintended consequences as well as increases the costs involved for existing and new and beginning farmers and ranchers seeking land access.

One of my worries is that a lack of regulation on event venues will bring in folks who don't recognize or respect boundaries between the event venue and the surrounding adjacent farm land, and as many of us can attest this is a safety risk for those of us who run livestock. In particular, with events that support alcohol sales and use, or other legal inebriants, newcomers may be fooled by a petting zoo masquerading as a working farm and may try to treat neighboring animals with the same casualness as the highly socialized animals often used for such attractions. I can guarantee my livestock guardian animals are just as unimpressed with drunks as they are with coyotes and other pests. While I have warning signs posted and I use all due caution while navigating protective cow calf pairs and rutting rams or rowdy bulls, the liability of an uninvited guest from a neighboring venue would become a burden that was solely on my ranch if an unfortunate event occurred.

Rural agricultural zoned areas need to remain agricultural not only for the safety of our food systems, but for the safety of the public who may not understand the difference between a steer or a bull. There are plenty of areas which are appropriate for the large scale event venues that would inevitably take over our farm lands with the passage of such a bill, but there is precious little arable land or water available for producing the crops that feed our fair state and those exported from Oregon. Corporate interests are the only interests which get furthered by weakening farm and forest zoned land use laws, and yet these same interests provide very little in the form of either food or lumber for our communities. Struggling rural economies need support in forms that make sense, and undercutting actual farmers isn't it.