

Submitter: Linden Steinmann
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
Measure, Appointment or HB4153
Topic:

I am a Sauvie Island resident and former summer employee of Topaz Farm writing in Opposition to HB 4153. My career is in agriculture. As a longtime employee of Oregon Tilth I work with Oregon Farmers on a daily basis. I see the struggles of affordability and the barrier to entry for new farmers who cannot afford farmland in the state. I feel that HB4153 would make it more difficult for small, real farms to get started and succeed. I know through my work as an auditor at Oregon Tilth that it is entirely possible for one to make a living farming, without a farm stand permit at all. For fairness, I will state that I enjoyed working at Topaz Farm for their summer concert series this past summer, and I also attended one of their farm to table dinners, which was lovely. I will also state that I don't see Topaz as a farm, but as a farm-themed amusement park. It's wonderful for what it is, but their business needs do not align with the needs of farmers who actually farm for a living. Farms with farmstands already have plenty of leniency where use of farmland is concerned. I worry that if HB 4153 were to pass, businesses could buy up farmland and use it for non-farming uses, as the bill lacks guardrails to ensure that farm land remains primarily used for farming. I fear this incentivizes commercial developers and not farmers who want to farm. As a resident of Sauvie Island, I also have significant concerns about the bill bypassing the "good neighbor" impact assessment. Island residents already wait in long traffic lines just to get to our homes at many times during the year due to farmstand activities. It was decided long ago by Island residents to maintain the rural character of the Island. It is unfair to use farmland with lower tax rates for commercial business use. As an organic advocate, this bill also overlooks the ecological impact of placing businesses that aren't farming in a responsible manner in agricultural areas, i.e. instead of a biodiverse farmed field you might instead have a parking lot. Furthermore, I believe this bill favors businesses aren't primarily farms, and does injustice to actual small farms that don't have a farmstand component.