

Submitter: Brian McCormick

On Behalf Of:

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

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4153

Co-Chairs Helm and Owens, Vice-Chair Finger McDonald, and members of the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water:

As a smallholder farmer in Wasco county, I am eligible to sell my fruit directly from my 50-acre property under both existing and the proposed laws. So although I am technically unrestricted by its language, I am opposed to HB 4153 because it works against the rural world I wish to inhabit. In today's near absence of traditional mixed-production fruit and vegetable farms (at least in these counties), we need to safeguard every opportunity for even agriculture's smallest practitioners, to help enable neighborhood produce to reach neighborhood kitchens. HB 4153 would turn its back on these emerging enterprises.

Our community in the Gorge grows little of its own food, and the remaining farmland is almost exclusively larger, commodity-scale orchards and vineyards. Prudent advances toward community-based food production will be cautious, with individuals taking tentative steps to sell food they're learning to grow on small acreages. New entities are wise to gain experience and confidence before they expand; their communities will need, simultaneously, to learn to effectively support this stepwise growth. But this law proposes to make front-line marketing of farm-grown produce more difficult or downright impossible for the smallest operations among us—an already vulnerable group.

Legislation that increases the stability of farms and keeps farmers going this difficult business is welcome, and HB 4153 gets some of this right. But the definitions adopted by this bill are wrong for rural communities. Income qualifications, minimum acreages, and a call for "farm stores" but not "farm stands" all reflect a prejudice against emerging producers, and the result would be a consequential setback for new farms and smallholders and for local food. Please find a better, more inclusive solution.