

Submitter: Kathy Dunn

On Behalf Of:

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

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4153

Talking Points: Strongly Oppose HB 4153 – Safeguard Small Coastal Oregon Farms and Local Food Resilience

Small farms dominate Oregon agriculture – and are essential to local systems
Oregon has 35,547 farms (2022 USDA Census), with the majority small-scale:
Farms under 50 acres make up 67% of all farms (32% under 10 acres + 35% 10–50 acres).

These small operations account for just 2% of total farmland but play a vital role in direct-to-consumer sales and community food access.

Farms under 500 acres comprise 90% of Oregon farms and contribute significantly to local food systems (Oregon State Board of Agriculture 2025 Report).

Coastal southern Oregon farms are even smaller due to geography

In rugged coastal areas like Curry County (home to Gold Beach), limited flat land, steep terrain, high land prices, and small parcels make large-scale farming impractical.

Statewide average farm size is 430 acres, but coastal/inland contrasts are stark—eastern and valley counties have larger operations, while southern coastal farms align with the statewide trend of very small holdings dominating direct sales.

Geography alone limits arable land; imposing inland-oriented minimum size thresholds ignores this reality and threatens viability.

Direct sales via farm stands/stores are critical for small producers

Small farms rely heavily on established roadside stands, small stores, and direct channels to reach consumers—especially in remote coastal communities.

Nationally and in Oregon, small family farms lead in direct-to-consumer sales (e.g., farm stands, markets), generating billions in local economic activity.

In Oregon, direct-market farms (often under 50 acres) support community connections, fresh affordable food, and farm survival—76% of direct-selling farms are smaller than 49 acres.

HB 4153 creates an unfair, one-size-fits-all burden

The bill's minimum size/permitting rules favor larger inland farms while disproportionately harming smaller coastal ones that cannot scale up due to land constraints.

This ignores regional equity: coastal farms operate under different geographic and market parameters, yet provide irreplaceable fresh, local food to isolated towns.

Threats to supply chains make local food security non-negotiable

Oregon's rural coastal communities face heightened risks:

Geopolitical uncertainty and potential global disruptions.

Frequent road collapses on rural coastal highways.

High likelihood of a major Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake (magnitude 9.0+ possible), which could isolate the coast via bridge/road failures, landslides, and tsunamis—creating "island effects" with no trucking access for weeks or longer (Oregon Dept. of Emergency Management).

In such scenarios, external food supplies could vanish quickly; small local farms with on-site stands/stores are a frontline defense for fresh food access.

Bottom line: These "small" farms deliver outsized value

Though modest in size, southern coastal farms provide vital, fresh, affordable food right where it's needed most—without long-haul dependency.

Harming their direct-sales ability through HB 4153 weakens resilience for all residents in remote areas. Oregonians overwhelmingly support small farms (public surveys show strong preference over industrial models).

We cherish and urgently need these operations—they keep our communities fed, connected, and prepared.

Recommendation:

Vote NO on HB 4153.

Protect existing small farm stands and stores. Pursue policies that include—not exclude—the smallest producers who sustain rural coastal Oregon's food system. (Prepared from a Gold Beach-area perspective, drawing on USDA Census data, OSU Extension reports, and state emergency planning resources.)