

Submitter: Kat Topaz

On Behalf Of:

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

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4153

I am extremely supportive of HB4153

My husband and I have a farm stand on Sauvie Island.

When we bought the farm Jan 2020, we had one goal: grow produce without chemicals.

A few months into being new farm owners, Covid, the protests, and fires happened. We quickly learned having a farm is much bigger than just growing things. We have a responsibility to our community. We hosted the local school's graduation, when it was unsafe to gather indoors for the ceremony. Farms are part of our communities.

We became a place for other farms to bring their animals when their farms were threatened by fire.

During the protests, the farm again became a safe space for folks to come together in community. Our farm became a safe place for a lot of folks who needed a place to come to, to recharge and nurture their mental health.

None of this slowed the growing of produce. If anything it accelerated it because more folks learned of our farm and wanted to support it.

Jim and I are "retired". We spent our careers in Portland. We sold everything we had to have this farm. Most young people who want to get into farm don't have the resources we did. As a state, I strongly believe Oregon needs to make farming more accessible. We do not grow enough food to feed Oregonians. Let that sink in. Some of this is due to cheaper food is brought in from other states/countries. The result: we cannot feed ourselves, yet we have so many obstacles preventing farmers from being sustainable.

Jim and I are luckier than most because our farm has more revenue opportunities than most farms. This is not fair or equitable. We would not have been able to survive without the added revenue streams. Remember the 117 degree summer, we lost tens of thousands of dollars in labor and berries when all our raspberry plants were destroyed. Deer ate five acres of strawberries in two nights, also doing tens of thousands of dollars in damage. This is farming. Mother nature is formidable.

When the current rules were written in the 70s, it was common for customers to buy 50 pounds of beets, or pick multiple flats of berries to make preserves. Today, the majority of our customers don't know how to cook beets. And most customers come pick berries as an activity, picking 2 or 3 pints. Some still pick an entire flat, but they are the minority. When the rules were written, water was free. Now even a bottle of water counts against us in the 75/25 rule. I think we should encourage Oregonians to buy their drinks at the farm while they are visiting, instead of Starbucks.

In grocery stores, customers often buy salad kits, but farms can't sell salad kits without it counting against our 75/25. The rules are outdated.

We are one of two farms on Sauvie Island that are allowed to have farm to plate dinners. Yup, only two of us. These dinners are magical, they allow folks to enjoy Oregon at its best. The menus are written days before the dinner, based on what is ready to harvest. Jim and I and the chefs speak at the dinners and share what's going on the farm, what the challenges have been. We help folks get more connected to their food. Why shouldn't all the farms have the ability to have dinners? These dinners can add much needed revenue, while supporting the farm mission.

We are also allowed to have paid field trips and workshops. Every weekday we have free activities for littles, nimal talks, tractor talks, farm storytime. These are not allowed at most farms. How does this hurt farming? How is this good for littles, when we are encouraging folks to get off their screens and be outside?

Access to farms is important. 74% of farms in Oregon make \$24,000 or less. We are at a crisis. We need to look for ways to make it easier for the small, ultra-small, medium and large farms to be sustainable. It will benefit everyone in our state.

Thank you for supporting this bill, and keeping the conversation going.