

Submitter: Elisabeth Varga

On Behalf Of:

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

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4153

Dear Committee Members:

I am an Oregonian and community member and strong supporter of local food options specifically small farmers, farm stand operators and small ranchers.

I am writing to you today to express my strong opposition to HB 4153. Farm stands are a vital part of connecting the public with our food system and building an understanding of what it takes to go from field to fork. But HB 4153 would restrict who is allowed to have a farm stand, replace current definitions with Farm Stores, and give large land-owners privileges at the expense of small farm stands in Oregon. We need to find a better solution.

I care about this because I frequent small farm stands that would not meet the acreage requirements in section 2.2 of the bill. Small farms must have the same opportunities to sell their produce as larger farms. Small farms tend to grow for local soil, local climate, and local people. Big systems optimize for uniformity. Small farms often grow multiple crops, heritage varieties, mixed livestock, etc. That diversity protects soil (soil that is quickly becoming depleted by development and chemicals); supports crucial pollinators; reduces disease spread through diversity and resilient systems; and makes our local food system less fragile when something goes wrong (climate shocks, pests, supply chain issues). Smaller farms tend to prioritize soil care using less chemicals and incorporate important habitat like hedgerows, trees, and wildlife corridors. They're managing for ecosystems, not just output.

Farm stands have always been a pathway for folks to introduce themselves to a community. They have represented direct agriculture in a way that is missing from many people's understanding of the food system. Farm stands allow new, beginning and small farmers to carve a niche for themselves without having to compete with larger farms in forums like wholesale markets, institutional sales, or even farmers markets. Very small farms are drawn to farm stand sales because they are creating their own market and they represent an opportunity for your community to decide to support you simply because they think your stewardship is valid, they believe in how you take care of the land and produce food, flowers, or other ag products, and they want you to exist. They are also a boon to folks who are scaling their businesses, have to maintain off farm income to continue their health coverage or pay their bills, are only selling a little over their subsistence production or who simply want to pay the costs of doing the conservation work on their own farm. This bill tells all those

farms that what they are doing is invalid and not as important as farms who are able to scale production to a certain arbitrary level. We are taking opportunities away from small farms with this bill.

I am asking you to not have a higher burden on the smallest farms. This bill takes away opportunities from small land holders and farms in order for larger operations to be able to host more events. This is not a good bargain for Oregon and a better deal must be found.

I urge you to oppose this bill. Thank you,  
Elisabeth Varga