



February 6, 2026

House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
Oregon Legislative Assembly

RE: Support for HB 4049

Co-Chair Helm, Co-Chair Owens, Vice-Chair McDonald and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Oregon Farm Bureau (OFB) and consistent with the position of the Harney County Farm Bureau, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 4049, which seeks to elevate local voices in the pursuit of voluntary, collaborative approaches to responsible water conservation in the Harney Basin. We recognize the real challenges facing the Greater Harney Valley, and we appreciate the sustained engagement and leadership shown by local producers and community partners who have stepped forward to work toward durable solutions resulting from the state-authorized over appropriation of our limited water resources. That local commitment matters, and it should remain the foundation for any workable groundwater path forward.

OFB supports HB 4049-3 because it reinforces a voluntary, locally driven approach for groundwater users within the Greater Harney Valley Groundwater Area of Concern to determine how to reach reasonably stable groundwater levels within a reasonable time. The amended bill preserves the concept that local agreements—when properly structured—can provide a practical way to phase in reductions, recognize conservation and efficiency efforts, and support the long-term sustainability of the resource while minimizing economic disruption for the region.

We also appreciate that the amended bill includes clear process steps and public accountability: agreements must be submitted to both the Commission and OWRD, OWRD provides a review and recommendation, and the Commission retains approval authority. The amendment also adds guardrails such as periodic review and confirms that the Commission cannot require a minimum participation threshold as a condition of approval—important elements for maintaining a fair and workable voluntary framework.

At the same time, we want to be transparent about our perspective on the introduced version of the bill. OFB prefers the greater flexibility policy elements and the stronger OWRD requirements contained in the original HB 4049. In particular, the introduced bill provided broader tools for participants to adjust how water is managed under an agreement and reflected a more prescriptive structure for state implementation. The -3 amendments narrow and soften several of those original features. We understand why those changes were made as part of a workable compromise, but we note them because flexibility and clear administrative expectations are often essential for successful participation on the ground.

Even with those differences, HB 4049-3 still represents meaningful progress. It keeps the focus on voluntary, locally tailored solutions while improving administrative realism, lowering barriers to participation, and adding oversight guardrails that can help ensure agreements remain effective over time.

In conclusion, while OFB would have preferred the original bill's broader flexibility and stronger implementation requirements, we recognize the compromise nature of the amended bill and the importance of moving forward with a framework that local stakeholders can support. For those reasons, Oregon Farm Bureau respectfully supports HB 4049-3.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ryan J. Krabill', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Ryan J. Krabill
Oregon Farm Bureau