

Submitter: James Abeles - Corrected

On Behalf Of:

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

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4153

Co-Chairs and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jim Abeles, and I am a co-owner of Topaz Farm. I am writing on behalf of our farm and myself only, and not on behalf of any community organizations with which I am affiliated.

I am writing in support of this bill.

Like many small and medium-sized farms across Oregon, we are operating in a very different economic and environmental reality than when many of our land-use statutes were written. Consumer purchasing habits have changed significantly, and at the same time, climate conditions have become more unpredictable. Farms like ours must adapt to both realities in order to survive.

Small and medium-sized farms can no longer rely on traditional sales channels alone. To remain viable, we need farm-direct sales models that reflect how people buy food today and that allow farms to capture enough value to stay in business.

One of the most important ways we do this is through farm-to-plate dinners. These dinners are built around what we grow on our farm and what neighboring farms produce. Guests can walk the surrounding fields, see the crops, meet the farmers, and share a meal that reflects the farm's peak harvests. These dinners consistently sell out year after year. That demand reflects a clear shift in how people want to engage with food and agriculture. Customers are seeking transparency, connection, and a direct relationship with the farms that feed them. For many, these dinners are a meaningful way to support agriculture.

For Topaz Farm, this form of farm-direct sales is essential. Farm-to-plate dinners allow us to sell what we grow at its true value. They help us pay our field workers living wages, employ more people locally, and offset the very high costs of regenerative, chemical-free farming practices that improve soil health and keep land in agricultural production.

Climate change has also made flexibility and basic infrastructure increasingly important. Extreme heat, wildfire smoke, and unpredictable weather now affect when and how farms can safely host the public. The ability to use tents or covered and indoor spaces is not about expansion or entertainment — it is about safety, accessibility, and continuity. These structures allow us to protect guests, workers,

and food, and to continue farm-direct activities during increasingly volatile conditions.

Farm-to-plate dinners are the modern version of farm-direct sales. They directly connect our harvest to the people who eat it and reflect the economic and environmental reality facing today's working farms.

However, under current law, revenue from these dinners counts against us under the 75/25 income rule. As a result, the more successful these farm-direct efforts are at supporting our operation, the more compliance risk they create on paper — even though they are built around our own crops and other local agricultural products.

This creates a contradiction where farms are effectively penalized for adapting to changing markets and climate conditions, selling directly to consumers, educating the public about agriculture, and keeping farmland in active production.

This bill matters because it recognizes that farm-direct sales and agritourism have evolved. It provides clarity that small and medium-sized farms urgently need and aligns Oregon's land-use laws with the economic and environmental realities of farming today.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony and for considering the real-world impacts this legislation will have on farms like ours and others across the state.

Sincerely,  
Jim Abeles  
Co-Owner, Topaz Farm