

Written Testimony in Opposition to HB 4153

Co-Chairs Helm and Owens, Vice-Chair Finger McDonald, and Members of the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water:

My name is Rebecca Thompson, and I own and operate Elemental Acres in Rainier, Oregon and Elemental Eats in Saint Helens, OR. I am writing to express my opposition to HB 4153.

****KEY POINT:** Small farms are the backbone of Oregon agriculture—not the exception.** According to the USDA Census of Agriculture, the majority of Oregon farms are under 50 acres, with a significant portion under 20 acres. These farms are legitimate, productive businesses that supply food directly to local communities.

Farm stands and other direct-to-consumer sales models are essential tools that allow farmers to survive, especially in the early years of operation. While I do not operate a traditional farm stand, we sell our farm products directly to our community through our food truck, and customers regularly pick up their farm orders at our farm. These models serve the same purpose as farm stands: keeping food local, building trust, and sustaining small farms.

****KEY POINT:** HB 4153 grants privileges based on land ownership, not farming activity.** The bill replaces long-standing farm stand protections with a new 'farm store' framework that ties eligibility to acreage and income thresholds. This approach disproportionately burdens small and beginning farmers while allowing large landowners to qualify with minimal land in production and no income requirement.

****KEY POINT:** Acreage is not a measure of legitimacy, productivity, or stewardship.** Many small farms generate more value per acre than large commodity operations. Yet HB 4153 imposes higher barriers on small farms while giving broader latitude to larger properties. A five- or ten-acre farm producing food for its community is no less legitimate than a farm operating on hundreds of acres.

****KEY POINT:** Farmers need multiple income pathways to survive rising costs and seasonal gaps.** Most farm expenses—feed, seed, labor, fuel, and infrastructure—are paid months or even a year or more before a product is ready for market. Input costs continue to rise while returns are delayed. Supplemental income from farm-related events such as farm-to-table dinners, workshops, pumpkin patches, and educational tours is often the difference between staying in business and shutting down.

We support farmers being able to supplement product sales with events that promote their farm and agricultural products. However, these activities should remain supplemental to

farming—not replace it. HB 4153 removes existing safeguards that ensure agriculture remains the primary purpose of farm stands and instead allows non-farm activities to dominate.

****KEY POINT:** This bill makes it easier to host events on farmland than to sell farm products.**

Under HB 4153, a large EFU-zoned property could host frequent events with minimal agricultural production, while a small farm selling its own products or hosting occasional educational events could be denied a permit altogether. This shifts opportunity away from food producers and toward landowners.

Oregon is already losing family farms at an alarming rate. Policies that place the greatest burden on the smallest farms accelerate consolidation and undermine food security. HB 4153 does not strike the right balance.

****ASK:** Please oppose HB 4153 as written and work with farmers of all sizes—especially small and beginning farmers—to protect simple farm stands, support equitable access to direct sales, and strengthen Oregon’s local food systems.**

Sincerely,
Rebecca Thompson
Elemental Acres
Rainier, Oregon

Sources:

- USDA, 2022 Census of Agriculture (Oregon)
- Friends of Family Farmers, HB 4153 Policy Analysis