

Submitter: NATALIE EGGERT

On Behalf Of:

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

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4153

I am opposed to HB4153 as it is written and the -2 amendment because it limits who is allowed to have a farm store for their operation and makes no specific protections for the simplest form of farm stand currently in operation. This bill goes far beyond what was discussed in previous public processes and would require many small farms our community depends on to close their farm stores – or keep them from applying for permits in the first place – while giving vast privileges to larger operations. Especially in our current economy, giving further unfair advantage to large operations while keeping small rural farms out of the process hurts everyone.

The new bill would create new eligibility requirements based on acreage in production or sales numbers for farms to even apply for a farm store permit. These requirements would put farm stands are affiliated with small and beginning operations at risk. The amended acreage requirements arbitrary and place a higher burden on smaller properties, it leaves the door open for someone who happens to own a lot of land to do nominal farm production and unlimited agri-tourism activity, which is not in the spirit of this law.

Farm stands have always been a pathway for folks to introduce themselves to a community. 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 because they think your stewardship is valid, they believe in how you take care of the land 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.

This bill makes farm stores easier and more permissive for large property owners while penalizing small land holders for having less to work with. Even if you support the 100 acre farmer example above, should it come at the expense of the 10 acre farmer