

Co-charis Sollman and Bynum, members of the committee. For the record my name is Aaron Nichols I am the manager and co-owner of Stoneboat farm, a five-hundred member CSA vegetable farm in Helvetia, east of some of the land being considered for inclusion in the UGB. I, my crew of ten people, and the 500 people who get food from us year round would be negatively affected by this bill. And the effects would extend far beyond us to our entire area, and eventually the state by irrevocably harming the land use laws and understanding that have made it possible for small farms like mine to grow and feed people in Oregon.

I am writing today to give you a little information about small farms in this area in general as well as my farm in particular and to let you know how sighting a semiconductor facility in agricultural land north of Hillsboro could negatively affect those of us who work on farms here. I'd also love to actually show you and/or your staff what I'm talking about on my farm should that be useful to you in making a decision. Please feel free to reach out should you have any questions or I can be of any help clarifying these impacts. I realize this is a long testimony, please consider having your staff read it though as I am a directly affected landowner, business owner, and food grower and would like to give you a full picture of the issue.

#### **Small farms in Oregon and the Metro Area:**

I was very happy to go back in person to the Small Farms Conference put on by OSU this year and see the hundreds of folks who grow veggies for direct market. The attendance was capped at 800 people and that meant that at least that many Oregon farmers didn't go as did! And we're leaders in this national trend - the leading national magazine for our industry "Growing for Market" has about half its contributors writing from Oregon right now. And it's a good business too - at my farm we are able to employ six or so people year round and add another four in the summers - everyone gets a good, meaningful job with a livable wage. And we contribute to the local economy - we'll make around \$600,000 off our 14 or so tillable acres and virtually all of that goes back to other local vendors and circulates again in Oregon.

Here, as in much of the country, we represent a growing sector of the economy; I know that from experience. Every year I have multiple people on my crew planning to start their own farm in the area and a number of former employees have. For almost all of them the barrier isn't skill or even capital but the poor access to land that slows the growth and health of our industry.

But I think talking just about the economic impact isn't a good measure for small farms or farms in general. Growing the food here gives Oregonians a lot of control over the food in their communities and, like Oregonians often do, we can stretch those locally grown resources to benefit our state and take care of more people. I can attest that about 5% of my sales are to folks using a SNAP card or WIC checks every year. Of course, Oregon taxpayers, and you all in the legislature, have done their parts and we have Double Up Food Bucks to stretch the federal benefits twice as far and encourage folks to eat fresh, local food.

I also want to tell you a story about our farm in COVID 19 and during the supply chain issues we had then and for the next two years. About two weeks after COVID shutdowns started and food was becoming scarce, folks started turning to local farms. While some huge farms in Florida and California were dumping tons of produce, we pivoted our entire production, banded together with other farms, and bought as many extra seeds as we could (those were in short supply too) and we were able to feed three times the number of CSA members as we had the previous year. We also provided veggie boxes (free if you needed, pay if you could) during the worst months of the pandemic and supplied two very busy farmers' markets all year when

supermarket veggies were scarce. Besides the critical source of food in a scary time, we were able to provide community and reassurance to a lot of folks. The 350 or so families in our CSA that year got updates letting them know we were able to farm safely and distribute their food safely - they'd have food all year.

I don't think we've seen the last of supply chain issues, I'm not even sure we've seen the last of pandemics, and I worry that climate change will cause similar disruptions to our food supply. The great news is that we have the answer right here - we're growing it on our farms in the actual food we grow, in the cover crops that pull climate changing carbon from the air, and the people who will grow more farms in the future.

**Why we shouldn't develop more ag land north of Hillsboro:**

The farm land in this area is some of the best in the world. I believe the parcels being considered for development are class one and two soils (I farm on class two and three and find the soil to be amazing after farming worse soils in New York and farther west in Washington County). One reason I'm writing today is that I just drove past that land and thought how amazing it would be to farm. Oregon's land use laws are meant to protect these soils not just because they are near cities but because they are, for the most part, only near cities. Our best farmland is in the broad valleys west of the mountains - that's also where our cities were started and have grown. I think we've shown over the last 50 years that we can have both - growing cities with vibrant industries and productive farmland - but we have to be careful to manage that resource. That the good farmland doesn't extend very far - out to about the junction of 6 and 26 is as far as it goes West in our area and it is a narrow strip of farmland left north of the metro area.

Here north of Hillsboro, we are already experiencing the effects of farmland fragmentation. Fewer people farm as land prices rise and the expansion of Hillsboro has almost cut us off from the farm land to the south and is beginning to cut us off from the farm land to the west. That means our last tractor dealership left a few years ago, it means I have trouble finding farmers to ask advice of or help from, it means that many hope their 100 acres will sell for 10 million dollars and aren't looking to pass it on to another generation of farmers. Farming is harder in these circumstances not because the land is bad or we lack water but because of the way we've allowed cities to grow.

But harder isn't impossible and many of us still farm out here. The trends in the world are toward more local production and that bouys us up even as we drive 40 minutes for a broken three point pin. I worry though that we are near the tipping point. The location of the sites considered would be very detrimental for keeping this area farmable - it cuts us off even more from the rest of the farming community. As these sites get developed the pressures to expand West Union will grow greatly, the pressure to build more housing in North Plains will grow greatly, the pressure to add space for chip processing suppliers will grow with every passing year. If we aren't up to the challenge of protecting farmland now, what makes us think we will be then?

**Most troubling are sections 10 and 11 which have insufficient guardrails to prevent vast amounts of farmland from being included, with very scant public process and little professional review, in the UGB.**

When Oregon set up its land use laws fifty years ago the lawmakers and governor realized that a set of laws would not be sufficient to protect farmland. Over the last fifty years we have built a land use system that relies not just on the laws but on a social contract. Many people in the cities know and like their range and farmland (often it's why they moved here in the first place), cities know that they need to build up not out, and farmers are willing to make long term investments in the land. We have organizations that help protect both the laws and the land itself, and when necessary changes are made we try to take a balanced approach that includes public comment, professional advice, and long term thinking.

SB 4 sets up, both in practice and in the minds of those with the power to supersite or change land use laws, a separate process that doesn't include the most interested parties (or at least not those who would oppose it), that doesn't have any more professional review process than the governor feels necessary, and leaves the decision in the hands of a very small group of lawmakers, aides, and the governor. This is a system we simply can't trust to keep farmland viable or even farmland. How can I invest in my farm if, in two years, I might suddenly be included in the UGB and have non-compatible land uses all around me? How can I rent more land when someone can make 100 times the money selling to a developer to put up a Top Golf? Most concerningly, this process rewards power, influence and money - not long term thinking. We could easily be left to the whims of individual city councils and large developers when what we need is farmland growing food and farm products for our communities as climate change threatens our food supplies and the nation's food growing regions. Hurried backroom dealing isn't the way we do business in Oregon and it isn't what we need in Oregon.

**My ask is that, for the reasons outlined above, you and the committee refuse to consider good agricultural land or land zoned EFU for semiconductor siting and most urgently, strike sections 10 and 11 from SB 4.**

I want to end with a quick alternative - this isn't an ask; just an example of what might be possible if we don't hastily pave over very good farmland. I heard many mention that this isn't food producing or high value land. But it certainly could be. So, if you will, imagine this: What if rather than using its power to rezone this land, the legislature were to turn it into highly productive food producing land. Rather than making way for a semiconductor site, what if we got water rights for the property (they'd use less than any chip manufacturing) and allowed the landowner to parallelize into a few small and medium sized farm lots.

There are plenty of young farmers out there, maybe the state could help them get loans. In a few years, less than it would take to build a semiconductor plant we'd have a vibrant farming community there bringing in around 10-15 million dollars a year (assuming they produce similarly to my farm but sell wholesale - though they may well do better with better soils). Of course with that amount of farming in one place we'd have associated industries bringing in more money and really supporting our community. And in 100 years we'd still have food producers capable of supplying much of the region with food. That, to me, would be visionary leadership - seeing what could be there in 100 years, not just 10 or 20.

I hope you can join us in protecting farmland and building a secure future for Oregon in a changing climate and changing world. Please take the long view on this issue - we're counting on you!