

Chair Pham, Vice Chair Anderson and members of this committee,

I am testifying in opposition to SB1578. I am a 6th generation rancher in Eastern Oregon and with the recent birth of a great grandson there are now 9 generations enjoying the blessings and sacrifices of our agriculture industry and culture in Eastern Oregon.

SB 1578 terrifies me. I understand and appreciate the motives of finding solutions to help end current housing shortages. I also believe in private property rights and sustaining local control when it serves a positive purpose, but SB 1578 is a severe wrecking ball to already diminishing agriculture land. As we all know it has become harder and harder to maintain a business, especially farming and ranching. Since we are not able to make more ag land and the land that is currently used to produce food and fiber for the world is rapidly disappearing for myriad reasons I do not endorse taking viable resource lands and allowing urban sprawl to usurp more of it. The need for more housing should be alleviated in already existing urban growth boundaries where water, infrastructure and lights have been planned for. To take valuable land out of production to satisfy the issue of housing shortages is a negative and short sighted solution. What will our beautiful state look like in 10 or 15 years with housing developments strewn throughout the agricultural landscape? What happens to the ground water table needed for irrigation once 5 houses per acre are allowed to be built and need water? What happens when 50, I repeat 50, houses are allowed to be built on a 10 acre parcel in the middle of an area where producing food and fibre are happening?

I can understand why this SB1578 is supported by many county commissioners. And I am not begrudging them for it. Their obligation is toward the county and when they understand that 50 acres of the county could be removed from EFU and put on the tax roles as housing that is a significant increase in dollars. Once again, this is short sighted. Agriculture for most counties in rural areas is the number one income source, not only in the actual production but also the spin off to businesses that rely on the farms and ranches in the county. I hope they realize what their counties will look like with up to 250 houses in multiple housing developments scattered across the farmland and open spaces. It will ruin the landscapes and the agricultural industry. The once beauty of dark starry skies will be marred by light pollution, traffic, and the noises that belong in the urban areas not the farm and ranch land.

There is a strong emphasis, and rightfully so, on national and state parks and recreation areas for citizens to enjoy. I believe there needs to be equal or more emphasis put on preserving our rural agriculture lands for posterity. It is disappearing too rapidly already. Let's not expedite the demise by passing SB 1578.

Thank you for taking the time to thoughtfully read and think about the repercussions of this bill. I strongly and passionately oppose SB1578.

Sincerely,
Cheryl Martin
VP Ranch
North Powder, OR