

Submitter: Aaron Nichols
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Housing and Development
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1522

Dear Chair Pham and Committee Members,

I am writing to you today to strongly oppose SB 1522 as amended. This bill would end land use protections for farm and forest land that is near cities resulting in a high amount of sprawl and the paving of our best farmlands. This bill attempts to upend our land use system in an amended bill in a short session. This is not the kind of conversations that brought about our land use system and it's not the way to make real or thoughtful reforms of that system. Instead of engagement, this process cuts Oregonians out of the process and cuts Oregonians off from the lands they have protected and cherished for generations.

To me, this bill is very personal. I farm on about 15 acres of the best Missoula floods soil just a few miles from Hillsboro and North Plains. I am near two growing cities but have, so far, trusted that our land use system will protect farming in my part of Washington county so I can invest in my farm and expect it will remain viable for decades. Because of these protections I was able to buy the land and, over the last 13 years we've grown a business that employs ten people and feeds over five hundred families. But if farmland is lost to cities looking for land that is easy to develop, we will very soon lose the critical mass of farmland that keeps our ag infrastructure profitable and in business. We'll lose farming neighbors to data centers and subdivisions - neither of which are great neighbors to farmers.

I also oppose this for simple reasons of geology. Our best soils follow our valleys. Our biggest cities sit in those same valleys and the easiest, flattest land to develop is our best farmland. This isn't the midwest where the soil is about the same acre after acre. Our soils are amazingly productive but also very concentrated. Following a high sprawl pattern common in other states would quickly destroy our ability to feed ourselves.

Lastly I oppose this because I am a father. I see redwing blackbirds on my farm a full two months earlier than I did when I started farming. Fellow farmers had cherry tomatoes, from unheated greenhouses, at Christmas this year. Climate change isn't something that is coming or something that we can avoid. It is here. Part of the solution has to be adaption. Our options to adapt are limited, poor, and futile if we lack the farmland and farm economies to feed ourselves and buffer the worst of climate change with natural and working lands.

I hope you join me in opposing this bill for the reasons above and the many submitted by others.

Aaron Nichols