

# McPhillips Farms

McMinnville, Oregon

Testimony in Opposition to Oregon Senate Bill 1522-1.

February 12, 2026

Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Ramsey McPhillips. I manage a 600-acre grass seed and sheep farm in Yamhill County that has been in my family since the Civil War. I also operate Tainable, a regenerative agricultural laboratory that hosts seven agriculture-related businesses and non-profits focused on soil science, climate resilience, and farm viability.

I am writing today because Senate Bill 1522-1 strikes at the core logic of Oregon's land-use system, specifically Statewide Planning Goal 3 and the Exclusive Farm Use (EFU) framework that has protected this state's agricultural economy for over fifty years.

Goal 3 is not aspirational. It is explicit. It requires the state and local governments to preserve agricultural land for farm use, prioritizing the protection of the most productive soils - Class I and Class II - because they represent the highest long-term economic value to the state.

EFU zoning is the tool that implements that goal. It does so by:

- Limiting non-farm uses on high value farmland
- Suppressing speculative development pressure
- Ensuring land remains affordable and viable for farming.
- Preserving the economic base of Oregon's agricultural sector

This system works because it is grounded in a simple economic truth:  
Not all farmland is equal, and soil quality matters.

As a businessman, my work has not primarily been about commodity prices or crop selection. It has been about improving soil to increase long-term profitability. Farming is a business, and soil is the foundation of the business model. Its protection and improvement are not aesthetic or ideological concerns - they are economic necessities.

That is why Oregon's planning system has always treated soil classification as the primary determinant when evaluating whether land should remain in agriculture or be considered for urbanization.

The data supports this approach. USDA farmland value surveys in Oregon consistently show that land with higher productive capacity, often associated with Class I and II soils, commands significantly higher agricultural value than lower-quality land:

- Irrigated cropland (often Class I and II soils): approximately **\$7,650–\$8,000 per acre**

- Non-irrigated cropland (often lower-capability soils): approximately **\$3,000 per acre**
- Pastureland: approximately **\$1,080 per acre**

These values reflect agricultural earning power, not speculative development potential. They are the very values Goal 3 is designed to protect.

SB 1522 proposes to weaken or bypass soil classification as a justification for preserving farmland when expanding Urban Growth Boundaries. In doing so, it reverses the burden of proof that has defined Oregon land-use law since Senate Bill 100. Instead of requiring cities to avoid high-value farmland, it opens the door to treating all land as interchangeable.

That is not consistent with Goal 3.

That is not consistent with EFU precedent.

And it is not consistent with Oregon's long-term economic interest.

Regenerative agriculture strengthens this argument further. By investing in soil health — through cover crops, drainage, reduced tillage, and biological activity — farmers permanently increase the productive capacity and resilience of their land. In Oregon's EFU system, where speculative rezoning is intentionally constrained, soil improvement is the primary lawful pathway to land value appreciation.

My farm sits on the urban growth boundary of McMinnville. When McMinnville last expanded its UGB, it did so by explicitly avoiding Class I soils, in alignment with Goal 3. This spared my farm from being rezoned into housing. That decision gave me confidence to invest deeply in my land - financially, physically, and generationally - knowing those investments would not be erased by short-term urban pressure.

SB 1522-1 undermines that certainty. It signals to farmers such as me that even when they follow the rules, invest in soil, and operate within EFU expectations, the state may still choose urban expansion over agricultural economics.

Once high-value soils are converted, they are gone forever.

Once farm businesses are fragmented, they do not come back. Oregon's land-use system was designed to prevent exactly that outcome.

I urge you to reject SB 1522-1, uphold Statewide Planning Goal 3, and reaffirm the principle that Oregon's best soils are reserved for farming — not because of nostalgia, but because it is sound economic policy.

Thank you for your consideration.



Ramsey McPhillips.

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