



Locally Grown
and
GROWING STRONG

March 28, 2025

House Committee on Housing and Homelessness
Oregon Legislature

RE: Concerns with HB 2138 and Amendments

Chair Marsh, Vice-Chair Andersen, Vice-Chair Breese-Iverson and Members of the Committee:

Oregon Farm Bureau (OFB) is the state's most inclusive agriculture organization, proudly representing over 6,500 family farms and ranches that produce more than 220 agricultural commodities. From hops and hazelnuts to cattle, cranberries, and timber with operations spanning from just a few acres to thousands, our members utilize all farming methods including organic, conventional, regenerative, biotech, and even no-tech. My name is Ryan Krabill, and on behalf of OFB, thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Oregon's land use planning system has long sought to balance the need for housing with the protection of farmland, ensuring that agriculture remains a cornerstone of our economy and rural communities. **HB 2138 and its amendments threaten that balance by accelerating and incentivizing the conversion of high-value farmland to urban development, placing Oregon's agricultural future at risk.**

OFB recognizes the need to address the state's housing shortage. However, increasing density in urban unincorporated areas without clear safeguards for farmland will result in irreversible loss of agricultural land. If passed without amendments, HB 2138 will reduce Oregon's ability to produce vital, locally grown agricultural products and sustain its rural economy.

Accelerated Conversion of Agricultural Land

Oregon's urban unincorporated lands are among the most vulnerable areas for farmland loss because they sit within urban growth boundaries (UGBs) but remain outside city limits. Many of these lands are actively farmed and contain some of the most productive soils in the state, particularly in the Willamette Valley, where agricultural land is already under extreme development pressure. These areas also serve as a critical buffer between

urban and rural communities, helping to minimize land use conflicts between farmers and residential developments. Additionally, while these lands are often considered part of a city's future growth area, many remain economically viable for farming today and continue to contribute to Oregon's food production and agricultural economy.

HB 2138 would fast-track the urbanization of these lands by requiring local governments to permit middle housing development without fully considering the impacts on existing farmland. This approach is likely to increase land speculation, making it more expensive for farmers to continue operations as property values rise and taxes increase. With no meaningful safeguards in place, the bill effectively prioritizes urban expansion over farmland preservation, making it harder for agriculture to remain viable in these transitional areas.

The Interface of Agriculture and Community Development

Expanding high-density housing into urban unincorporated areas will bring new residents into direct conflict with farm operations, increasing the likelihood of disputes over normal farming practices. In many cases, farmers in these areas will face growing pressure to modify or scale back essential agricultural activities such as pesticide application, soil amendments, and irrigation. These conflicts often result in new restrictions on farming, limiting the ability of agricultural operations to remain competitive.

In addition to operational challenges, increased housing density will place additional strain on already-limited water resources. As municipal water demand grows, irrigation water for farms may become less available or more expensive, reducing the ability of farmers to produce crops efficiently. Similarly, higher-density development will lead to increased road traffic, particularly in areas where farm equipment must share roadways with urban commuters. As more people move into these areas, transportation infrastructure will need to expand, often at the expense of farmland, making it even more difficult for agriculture to remain sustainable in these regions.

Eroding Local Control and Planning Protections

Oregon's land use system has long relied on local governments to guide growth while protecting farmland. HB 2138 and its amendments undermine this principle by imposing a statewide mandate that overrides local decision-making and weakens land use protections. Under this bill, local governments would be required to allow housing density increases in urban unincorporated areas, even if the land is currently farmed or lacks adequate infrastructure. Additionally, the bill eliminates traffic impact assessments for middle housing projects, disregarding the increased infrastructure burden these developments place on both urban and rural communities. By limiting local governments' ability to regulate new development, HB 2138 removes an important tool for balancing housing needs with farmland protection.

Once high-density housing is introduced into these areas, the pressure to fully urbanize them will increase. Without the ability to plan for long-term agricultural viability, communities will be forced to accept rapid land use changes that favor urban development over farming. This loss of local control will accelerate the transition from farmland to residential neighborhoods, pushing agricultural operations out of areas that have supported farming for generations.

Protect Farmland While Addressing Housing Needs

OFB urges the committee to reject HB 2138 unless it is amended to provide explicit farmland protections. At a minimum, the bill should exempt high-value farmland within urban unincorporated areas from middle housing mandates, ensuring that land currently used for agriculture remains available for farm operations. Additionally, the bill should require a farmland impact assessment before increasing housing density in urban unincorporated areas, allowing local governments to evaluate the consequences of development on agriculture and adopt policies that mitigate these impacts.

Restoring local control over land use planning is essential to ensuring that communities can address housing needs without undermining long-term agricultural viability. Local governments must be given the flexibility to determine where and how housing density increases should occur, rather than being forced to apply a one-size-fits-all approach that does not account for local farmland protection efforts. Furthermore, infrastructure costs for new development should not be unfairly shifted onto nearby farmers, who should not be expected to bear the financial burden of urban expansion.

Conclusion

Oregon's agricultural land is not an unlimited resource. Once farmland is converted to urban use, it is lost forever. HB 2138, in its current form, accelerates the permanent loss of high-value farmland by prioritizing housing expansion over the careful planning that has historically protected our state's agricultural economy. OFB urges the committee to amend this bill to safeguard farmland and maintain a balanced approach to growth. Oregon can and must support housing development while preserving the land that feeds our communities and sustains our rural way of life.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Ryan J. Krabill
Oregon Farm Bureau