

Testimony to LCDC

May 1, 2008

There are two types of farming here in the US.. The large corporate farms that provide most of us with most of our food, and small organic local farms that are becoming more and more popular. My family's farm, at almost 400 acres is too small to be a profitable food producing business, but way to large to do the labor intensive, nurturing type of farming that we have begun to call organic. I have spent the last few years of my life trying to divide my family's farm into small enough parcels that it could be used profitably by someone. The ridiculous land use laws that require contiguously owned pieces of property to remain in one piece, or meet some arbitrary agricultural income criteria, have done nothing but drive an entire generation of elderly farmers into bankruptcy and the shame that comes with allowing your family's heritage to deteriorate into non-productive albatrosses around our necks. It is time for a new generation of farmer to take over and produce food that doesn't have to compete with the large corporate farm.

Many people here in the Willamette Valley feel that if they drive down I-5 and everything is green, all is right with the world. This couldn't be further from the truth. During my work with Measure 37, I spoke with many people who felt concern that over 50% of the food we eat is grown somewhere else, like China or Chile. The reason is purely economic. Food can be grown cheaply in far away places where they have paid pennies per acre and next to nothing for labor. That food can be shipped here and arrive in our markets at much less cost than we can produce that same food. We have wonderful soil in most of the Willamette Valley, but our growing season is approx. 120 days. This means we get only one crop per year while Mexico and other warmer climates can harvest 3 crops per year with the same acreage. Many farmers have turned to nursery stock and grass seed, crops which support urban growth and deplete the topsoil at an alarming rate. If this keeps up, we won't have any of our beloved fertile soil here in the Valley. By then, there won't be any of the farming options that we have today. Protecting farmland as greenspaces, that produce nothing, is pointless.

So, what can we do to promote the small organic farms that may someday feed us all? First of all, organic farmers need good soil and readily available water for irrigation. They also need to be segregated from neighborhoods and commercial farms that may use chemicals. They must be small enough plots of land that can be farmed by an individual farmer or farm family. My research indicates that 10-20 acres is the correct size. And of course they must be able to live on their land. I am proposing organic farms communities. These areas cannot simply be legislated into existence. Each area must be carefully researched for viability. Perhaps some sort of owners association who would be responsible for making sure that everyone followed the CC&R's of the organic farming community.

Let's make this happen before a food supply crisis or lack of viable topsoil makes this plan unworkable.

Respectfully submitted,

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