

Smith Holly

From: jeanedwards@wildblue.net
Sent: Tuesday, March 21, 2017 1:47 PM
To: HEE Exhibits
Subject: Testimony in Support of House Bills 2705, 2706, and 2707 Jean Edwards, blueberry farmer

Dear Committee members,

Since 1980, my husband and I have farmed blueberries in rural Washington County. I am also on the Board of WaterWatch. Our blueberry crop is irrigated by water pumped from a tributary of the Tualatin River. In recent years our irrigation water (and anyone else who sells to a fruit processor) must be tested during harvest as part of food safety: if the irrigation water applied to the berries is too contaminated, the fruit can't be sold.

I want to stress that this water quality testing is not a state requirement, but one that is market-driven by cautious processors and by public demand. Without this annual 'clean bill of health' water testing, our fruit is not accepted for marketing. Period. Thus, it is in our best interests to support actions that conserve stream and ground waters, in part, because those streams need to provide sufficient flows to dilute contaminants found in irrigation water used for food production.

As part of our farm management, we also have installed an irrigation water meter at the pump. The meter was part of a cost-share arrangement with our local NRCS. It was not as expensive as I had expected and the measuring system has worked well for us. We found that we can use less water for irrigation, which has in turn reduced our electricity pumping costs. I understand that such metering cost-share programs with NRCS can be made available to interested farmers and ranchers elsewhere in the state.

I support these 3 bills because all of them address Oregon's lack of basic information on water availability and usage. If we don't have an idea of how much water we've got, we can't possibly know how much we can pump.

HB 2705. Metering would provide information on how much water is being used. It's common sense and is part of the responsibility and cost of farming and ranching.

HB 2707. Last year's audit of the Oregon Water Resources Department showed groundwater amounts aren't known at all in many areas. Across the state, wells and streams regularly run dry because officials have promised more water than nature can provide. Our farm relies on well water for drinking as do tens of thousands of other Oregonians. This bill would begin to address the problem by collecting user fees to specifically fund basic information gathering. This is especially needed whenever the state is considering new water permit applications in water-scarce parts of Oregon.

HB 2706. The audit of the Water Resources Department found the state often doesn't know what water is available when considering new applications. The proposed \$100 fee is not an onerous burden. We will have more certainty by targeting those fees for collecting water information.

All of the western states face water shortages and uncertainty and Oregon is not unique in that regard. I have been checking on how it's being handled in other states. We can learn what works and what doesn't from others without re-inventing the wheel. These 3 measures are a good start.

