



MELISSA CRIBBINS
COOS COUNTY COMMISSIONER

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February 21, 2019

TO: The Honorable Brian Clem, Chair
House Committee on Agriculture & Land Use

FROM: Melissa Cribbins, Commissioner

RE: House Bill 2573

Chair Clem and Members of the Committee:

My name is Melissa Cribbins, and I am a Coos County Commissioner from the Southern Oregon coast. The majority of the cranberries grown in Oregon are grown in Coos and Curry counties, and we have about 150 family farms. In 2016, Oregon produced 394,000 barrels of cranberries on 2,800 acres with a production value of \$10.4 million. That was a significant drop from the previous year, but in line with what has been happening with the industry over the past decade. As recently as 2008, Oregon's cranberry industry was valued at \$36 million even though production was roughly the same as it was in 2016. The big factor has been the price received by growers, just a fraction of what they were paid per pound nine years ago. A current glut of cranberries on the market this year adds to the price problems. Last year, the USDA authorized destruction of 25% of the crop, after a 15% destruction in 2017. To add to the economic woes of the cranberry farmer, China has increased its tariff on cranberries to 40%, up from 25%, as retaliation for US tariffs.

The decrease in value of cranberries have left many agricultural producers them with no other means than to either covert the farms to other crops or sell. Many farms are left barren with limited alternatives. Cranberry bogs are often designated as wetlands and are not easily converted to pasture or other crops and rezoning the property is almost impossible. Over the years, many agricultural producers have come to our local planning department to site dwellings on their property to help reduce the expense of offsite dwellings and allow them to continue to farm cranberries. There have been citizens within Coos County that have even expressed an interest in becoming a small agriculture producer but cannot afford to live offsite and maintain the bogs.

Our cranberry bogs and the surrounding lands are classified as high value farmland because berries are listed as a high value farm crop within the statutory definition. In the majority of the cases, the soils do not support the classification. If the property owner wanted to build their home on their property in order to manage their bogs, they would have to meet the \$80,000 income test, instead of the lower threshold \$40,000 test that is more appropriate for the soils.

There are a few other processes that are available but they are also based on the category of high-value farmland. The only other process available to site a dwelling is through the exception process (rezone to another zone that would allow for dwellings) but given the land use history and case law, these exceptions would not likely be successful.

This bill would make an exclusion to the definition of high-value farm crop to remove cranberries from the broader "berries" classification. This bill is not encouraging nonfarm dwellings, but it would allow our cranberry farmers to have some small level of flexibility in the use of their lands including the ability to build a farm dwelling so they can tend their crop. It is likely that lenders may be more willing to loan on small farms that are allowed to have dwellings due to the value and that will encourage more people to enter in the agricultural operations within our county as people will not have to pay for an offsite dwelling and farmland at the same time. The point of this bill is to encourage growth and sustainability for cranberry producers by allowing a little bit of flexibility.

Thank you for your time, and I welcome your questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Melissa Cribbins". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Melissa Cribbins
Coos County Commissioner