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February 21, 2018

Testimony on HB 4060
Family Farmers Oppose the -7 Aggregate Mining Amendment

Co-Chairs Beyer and McKeown, Members of the Committee

Friends of Family Farmers represents small and mid-sized family farmers across Oregon. We work to build strong local and regional food systems and to ensure that family-scale agriculture remains viable in our state today and into the future.

In our view, high quality farmland is not a renewable resource and it needs to be protected from development and permanent conversion to non-farm uses. As such, we are writing to oppose the -7 amendment to HB 4060. This amendment would strip away the ability of counties to protect local landowners from the negative impacts of aggregate mining through local permitting processes.

Many aggregate mines in western Oregon have been located or proposed in areas of high value farmland or in the midst of multiple agricultural operations that could be negatively impacted by dust, traffic, or changes in water quality or quantity these mines can bring. Many aggregate mining operations are simply incompatible with neighboring farm uses and the local permitting process is typically the only way for landowners to have their voices heard and their concerns addressed.

Under the current land use process, the vast majority of aggregate mines proposed in farm zones have ultimately gone forward. But by going through the local land use process, these operations have had to address potential conflicts and adopt mitigation strategies. Mitigation strategies such as setback distances from neighboring landowners and other steps to ensure that irrigation and domestic wells are not impacted by mining operations are key to ensuring that mines that do get sited do not harm nearby farming operations.

The -7 amendment would do away with this local process and put local farmers in harm's way when new aggregate mining operations are proposed. This would be a massive shift in public policy and one that should not be rushed forward during the short February 2018 session. If anything, protections for farmland and water resources from aggregate mining proposals need to be strengthened, not reduced.

Again, we urge your opposition to the -7 amendment to HB 4060.

Sincerely,

Ivan Maluski
Policy Director