

Questions persist on urban farm tax relief laws

Lawmakers must resolve conflict over urban growth boundaries

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Legislation providing tax relief for urban farmers has progressed in the Oregon House but concerns about unintended land use effects continue to shadow the proposal.

House Bill 2723, which allows local governments to impose lower property taxes on urban farms, was recently referred for a vote on the House floor by a key legislative committee.

Despite voting 6-1 for a “do pass” recommendation, members of the House Committee on Rural Communities, Land Use and Water said questions must still be resolved about the impact of “agriculture incentive zones” on urban growth boundaries.

Under HB 2723, urban farmers in these zones would be subject to lower property tax rates as long as they use their properties for agriculture for five years.

The Oregon Home Builders Association is concerned that landowners who make such commitments

will effectively exclude their properties from residential construction within cities.

The group wants local governments to consider the effect of agriculture incentive zones when deciding whether to expand their urban growth boundaries, but the Oregon Farm Bureau fears this will put development pressure on farmland in rural areas.

The bureau also wants lawmakers to impose a sunset on the program so that it can eventually be re-evaluated, said Katie Fast, OFB’s vice president of public policy. “We feel the need to have a check-back with the legislature.”

Lawmakers have attempted to resolve the conflict with an amendment that specifies agriculture incentive zones are a factor in evaluating a city’s potential for future development.

However, state regulators think the provision may clash with other language in the bill that says these zones have no effect on a city’s inventory of buildable lands, said Rep. Brian Clem, D-Salem.

Rep. Mike McLane, R-Powell Butte, said he gave HB 2723 a “courtesy no” so that the bill would not appear to have unanimous support, thereby signaling to the Senate that revisions are still necessary.



Inmates Truett Watts, left, and Frank Ochoa load bagged potatoes into boxes for shipping at the Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution on Monday in Pendleton. The potatoes will be distributed to food pantries via CAPECO throughout Umatilla, Morrow, Gilliam and Wheeler counties.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

POTATOES: Hale Farms donated 10 tons from its 2014 harvest

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“The Department of Corrections has a lot of capacity to do this kind of stuff,” Burt said. “I think there’s more we can do with them.”

Burt recommended Peck get in touch with Craig Reeder, vice president of Hale Farms, who has been involved in Farmers Ending Hunger since the organization formed a decade ago. Hale Farms already donates an acre of corn, peas and carrots to the food bank every year, while River Point Farms — part of the Hale Companies — was recently named “Hunger Buster of the Year” for its regular donation of onions.

“I think they knew it was for a good cause. There were a lot of smiles. They seemed to be enjoying it.”

— **Jackie Peck**, assistant to the prison superintendent

Reeder said he had a extra line on potatoes, which are always needed by the food bank as a staple item in emergency food boxes. With the blessing of their major customer ConAgra Foods, Reeder came through with a whopping 10 tons from the farm’s 2014 harvest.

“That’s probably our largest single donation,” Reeder said. “To have it run through the prison and have them package and put it together in a form that’s deliverable, I thought that

was a cool piece to that.”

Eastern Oregon farmers owe their land and their living to community support, Reeder said. For that reason, it’s important for them to give back.

“That’s a real important part of what we do,” he said.

Packaging fresh produce for the food bank is also a meaningful job for inmates at EOCL, Peck said.

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it.”

Diana Quezada, food programs coordinator for CAPECO, said their relationship with the prison will continue and could possibly expand to include more packaging in future years.

“If we have the prison rebagging our foods, I can work with more farmers,” Quezada said. “I think it can grow to be an even better partnership.”

CAPECO food banks serve about 800 families on a monthly basis, and bring in approximately 200,000-250,000 pounds of locally grown food per year.

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OSU uses UAVs to take temperatures from the Hermiston sky

Oregon State University

CORVALLIS — For the first time, scientists at Oregon State University this month began measuring atmospheric temperatures with fiber optic thermometers suspended from unmanned aircraft — combining two emerging technologies to probe a poorly understood swath of Earth’s atmosphere.

With funding from the

National Science Foundation, John Selker is buying two new unmanned aerial vehicles to loft sophisticated measuring instruments of his own design into an atmospheric zone that’s been hard to study until now.

“These two technologies together will add orders of magnitude to the precision and resolution of our atmospheric measurements,” said Selker, a hydrologist and

professor in OSU’s College of Agricultural Sciences. “We’ll be able to take a continuous slice of data through space and time, getting information that no one has been able to capture before.”

The high-powered thermometers use a down-to-earth technology: fiber-optic cable, similar to that used for telephone and Internet communication. By measuring tiny pulses of light zipping along

spun-glass strands, the fiber cables capture thousands of temperature readings along their length, detecting differences as slight as 0.01 degree Celsius.

In early-morning test flights near Hermiston, Selker’s OSU colleagues Michael Wing and Chad Higgins suspended a 400-foot sensing cable — not much thicker than a kite string — from an OSU-owned quad copter.

They flew the aircraft at 30 miles an hour, sending it high enough that the tip of the cable just touched the ground. The cable reported temperatures every 13 centimeters.

The researchers started their flights at sunrise because they wanted to see how the atmosphere develops in the boundary layer, the lowest portion of Earth’s atmosphere, as the sun’s heat begins to move the air.

The Earth’s surface and near atmosphere — up to about 1,000 meters above the ground — is a critical zone of feedbacks between air, water and earth, Selker said. “It’s where processes interact, where synergies occur. And temperature is a critical driver of these interactions.”

Until now, he said, scientists have had a hard time taking comprehensive measurements of the lower atmosphere.



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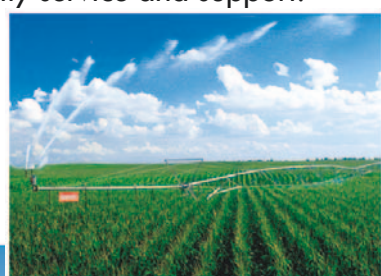
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