

Oregon needs a reasoned tax structure that supports the family agricultural operation in our state. When hard-working natural resource business owners pass on their legacy to their children, those receiving the farms are often forced to liquidate vital assets – such as land, equipment, or portions of the business – to pay inheritance taxes.

The state took an enormous step forward by passing a landmark piece of estate tax legislation. Both rural and urban legislators assured that family businesses that would normally have to sell assets to keep the farm, would no longer need to do so. You should not have to sell a stand of timber, strip a fishing vessel of its livelihood, or take away productive farm land just to pay a tax based more on the time of death than the vitality of your business. I am proud that if you want to keep doing what your family has done for a generation, you get to do that.

The Oregon Law Commission has examined the entirety of the tax code to determine a revenue-sensitive solution to this problem -- one that does not ask if there should be a death tax at all. Rather, it took on the job of tackling one of the most complex parts of the tax code to find a solution that trained practitioners, legal scholars, and business leaders could come together on. The solution deals with political realities and daunting state deficits. It made the law better for family businesses.

The Oregon Association of Nurseries, Oregon Farm Bureau Federation and others have been working for years to come up with a compromise. HB 2541 was approved by the State House with a vigorous debate. It is what we send people to Salem to do. Let's laud Oregon as a thought leader on how to positively use the tax code to keep natural resources viable rather than give ink to the extremes of this debate. Let's acknowledge that much of agriculture's estate tax value is held in property and equipment and discuss how HB 2541 is essential for the long-term viability of agriculture, forestry and fishing operations, rather than drawing attention to the side show in front of the Senate Revenue Committee.

It is not the Oregon way to lay low, allowing one chamber to debate a bill on its merit, then suddenly act like a flailing soccer player late in the game. It is not fair to the good house members who took a serious vote, and is disingenuous to those in the senate who wish to act with serious minds. I have an opinion on HB 2541. The bill clears up ambiguity in the tax law and allows farm, forestry and fishery operations to be passed on from one generation to the next.

Oregon's nursery and greenhouse industry supports this modification of Oregon's estate tax law. We implore the state senate to pass and Governor Kitzhaber to sign HB 2451. Our vital natural resource businesses depend on it.

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