

To: Oregon State Legislature, House Committee on Agriculture and Land Use
From: Blue Mountains Conservancy
Re: Strong support for HB 2729 and the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program
Date: February 11, 2019

Dear Chair Clem, Vice-Chairs McLain and Post, and members of the Committee,

We are writing to express our strong support for HB 2729. Funding the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHF) at \$10M for the 2019-2021 biennium will provide a critical set of tools to support farmers and ranchers in communities throughout Oregon.

As you know, OAHF was developed by a diverse coalition of stakeholders to protect Oregon's unique agricultural lands and the conservation benefits those lands provide. Many of these legacy lands are currently at risk to subdivision and conversion as 75% of Oregon's agricultural lands will change hands in the next 20 years. OAHF was codified by the legislature in 2017 with strong bipartisan support and became law, yet it lacks funding to implement the programs it was designed to deliver.

The creation of OAHF catalyzed a conversation in Oregon about the ways conservation and agriculture are not only compatible but also complementary – how our private working lands provide both the economic and ecological foundations for the state. Over the past year, the OAHF Commission, a group of leaders appointed by ODA, OWEB, ODFW, DLCD and OSU Extension, oversaw the program and finalized administrative rules. The 11 Commissioners make up a statewide leadership body that represents Oregon's farming, ranching, conservation and tribal communities. They collectively have volunteered hundreds of hours during the past year to attend monthly meetings and develop OAHF's administrative rules, which are ready to implement as soon as funding is secured.

As Oregon continues to face pressure on its productive agricultural land from low-density development, fragmentation, population growth, succession challenges and more, there is an urgent need for the voluntary tools that the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program is designed to provide. **We urge you to support the \$10 million funding request to *implement* the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program** and fund projects with the growing host of willing and interested landowners who want to protect their working lands for future generations.

Sincerely,

Blue Mountains Conservancy
La Grande, Oregon