

Chair Clem and Members of the Committee,

My name is Tiffany Whisenant and I am writing on behalf of myself and the School Garden Project of Lane County.

I'm writing to ask you to support HB 2579, to expand funding for Oregon's Farm to School and School Garden programs. This program is important because it helps kids, farmers, and Oregon's economy, all at once. Offering students the opportunity to learn in an outdoor setting is impactful on so many levels. In my personal experience, I have seen students grasp STEM concepts in a hands-on way in the school garden where they may have struggled to learn them in other settings, and these concepts are so important to expose Oregon's students to. Special-needs students benefit from learning in the school garden as there are multiple possibilities to engage every kind of learner. All students benefit from learning in a school garden / outdoor classroom setting, as being active while learning can do so much to help combat the global obesity crisis, teamwork and kindness are dominant themes, and students learn and are completely engaged in growing their own food, which is then shared with their families and wider communities. Also, and very importantly, working outside and with the earth increases overall happiness, not only for Oregon's students, but for our teachers as well!

When these concepts are reinforced multiple times each day with the food students eat at school, the entire community benefits. Students receive healthy, local food, and tend to make healthier choices not only at school but at home because of their exposure to growing and eating good food. Parents and caregivers can feel confident that their children are eating well at school, and school gardens offer the opportunity for the wider community to harvest healthy food, for free, over the summer. Farmers benefit economically and generally with programs such as this, as they are able to share local, quality food high in nutrients with a wider base, and within their own community. Students learn to value the food as well as the farm and the farmer, hopefully begetting a new generation of farmers, which is sorely needed in our community. Lastly, Oregon's economy benefits from this program, as the vast amount of resources spent on feeding children at our schools stays within our communities. This even helps to bridge the urban / rural divide in Oregon by making a huge connection for the community.

Thank you for your consideration and for your service.

