



April 17, 2021

Dear Co Chairs Johnson, Hayward, & Rayfield

Thank you for the opportunity to give testimony on the Oregon Agriculture Heritage Program (OAHP). As the State succinctly states on their website, “well-managed agricultural lands are the cornerstone of the state’s rural communities. They support valuable fish and wildlife habitat, and enhance other natural resources.” I could not agree more. As a 6th generation agriculturalist, I see those words in effect everyday with our neighbors, partners, and within our own operations. Our organizations, Beef Northwest Feeders and Wilson Cattle Co were born out of a dream of my ancestors when they settled in the Baker Valley in the 1870s. We have developed into a people-focused company where together we care for cattle and produce healthy beef for consumers in a responsible, sustainable way.

I speak today on behalf of the OAHP as I have seen the benefit of land easements firsthand. Beef Northwest and one of its partners own and operate roughly 22,000 acres of Zumwalt Prairie ground on Wallowa County. We worked with the Nature Conservancy to place a conservation easement on this ground. We were and are very happy with this because rather than having grazing management practices based on rigid, preconceived, standards they are outcome based. We and the Nature Conservancy are able make decisions based on what we are both seeing, rather than something predetermined.

More broadly, I believe that there are five simple reasons to fund the OAHP;

- **Supports agriculture**, Oregon’s second largest industry, by compensating landowners for keeping their land in production with easements and for implementing practices that conserve natural resources, improving long-term farm and ranch viability.
- **Supports conservation** while keeping working land working. Working land easements protect agricultural land, which produces 58-70 times fewer greenhouse gasses than urban land. And implementation of a conservation plan on agricultural land can support water quantity and quality and associated habitat.
- **Helps Oregon leverage federal funds** that we’ve left on the table for years. Oregon has only received 0.42% of funds distributed from the federal program that OAHP is designed to match. Several projects have secured 50% federal matching funds - all they lack is a matching grant like OAHP. Without state match, other landowners will miss out on opportunities to protect their lands and bring federal dollars to the state.
- **Supports rural economies**. Colorado found that for every dollar of federal working land easement investment, \$2.19 of economic activity is generated due to direct, indirect and induced spending in the state.
- **Is ready to implement immediately**. Program rules, grant applications, and a commission are already in place. All they require is funding.

It is no secret that rural America and rural Oregon is hurting and has been for some time. I view this program as a key tool in preserving rural culture, jobs, and the environment.

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Thank you for your public service, and for your undying support for our industry and way of life.

Zach Wilson
Beef Northwest Feeders