

To: Oregon State Legislature Ways and Means Committee
From: Blue Mountain Land Trust
Re: Testimony for Congressional District 2 State Budget Hearing
Date: April 18, 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of Blue Mountain Land Trust (BMLT), **I am writing to express strong support for funding the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program.** Funding the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP) at \$10M through the American Rescue Plan Act will provide a critical set of tools to support farmers and ranchers in communities throughout Oregon.

BMLT's service area covers seven Eastern Oregon counties that are home to numerous agricultural communities. Within the region, we have identified at least three cattle ranches totaling over 26,000 acres that BMLT could immediately begin working to protect with OAHP funding this year.

As you know, OAHP 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. OAHP 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 OAHP 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. Between 2017 and 2019, the OAHP Commission, a group of leaders appointed by ODA, OWEB, ODFW, DLCDC 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. Collectively, they have volunteered hundreds of hours develop OAHP'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 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,

Genevieve Perdue
Conservation Specialist
Blue Mountain Land Trust
John Day, OR