



Wednesday, April 21, 2021

To: Joint Committee on Ways and Means
From: Oregon Association of Conservation Districts
RE: Congressional District 3 Hearing on SB 5555 – ARPA Funding
Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHF)

Co-Chairs Senator Johnson, Senator Steiner Hayward and Representative Rayfield,

We seek the committee's support for \$10 million to fund the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) funds Oregon is receiving.

This program was adopted by the legislature in 2017 by strong bipartisan support but has not been funded. As Oregon continues to face development challenges encroaching on farmlands, this program can bring some relief.

The program has four internal sections that are administered by the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB): working land easements, conservation planning, succession planning, and technical assistance. OWEB's constitutional funding can only be used for projects that benefit habitat and water quality and quantity *exclusively*, and not for a program like OAHF that *also* supports agricultural values.

Representative Helm has called for \$10 million in funding for this program. Representative Owens has requested \$4 million for his district alone. A total of 11 projects with a combined budget of more than \$10 million that could protect thousands of acres of Oregon farm and ranch land are already shovel ready. Projects funded by OAHF state dollars can leverage significant federal funding matches.

Sincerely

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