



Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Sent electronically

April 20, 2021

Re: SB 5555 – Funding for Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program

Dear Joint Committee on Ways and Means:

The East Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District (EMSWCD) is a non-regulatory body that serves Multnomah County east of the Willamette River with a primary purpose of keeping water clean, conserving water and keeping soil healthy for the residents of our service area. One way we effect that work is through our efforts to ensure a sustainable future for agriculture within our service area. That work is needed – as Multnomah County has seen some **50,000 acres of farmland converted to other uses since 1945**, with a further **15% reduction in farmland acres operated from 2012 to 2017**. Access to farmland that has not been converted is a real challenge too, with the **average per-acre value of agricultural land and buildings increasing 75% in Multnomah County over the span of 5 short years (2012 – 2017)**. Without strategies that make sure farmland remains in production, is accessible and affordable to a diversity of farmers and is sustainably managed, it's uncertain that agriculture will be a part of our future. **We need your support for funding the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program in the amount of \$10 million via the American Rescue Plan Act dollars awarded to Oregon.**

We are tackling these challenges in many ways, but a key focus has been through our Working Farmland Protection Program. This program partners on a voluntary basis with farmers to purchase working farmland easements that ensure farm properties remain in active production, are sustainably managed and are accessible and affordable to the next generation of farmers. Our resources to fund these easement acquisitions – which can provide an important source of capital for farmers – are limited. **Leveraging our funds with State dollars and Federal funds will enable us and others to expand the impact of our working farmland protection work.** The lack of State dollars for working farmland protection has resulted in Oregon receiving a small fraction of the federal funds that states with matching programs do; Oregon has received only 0.42% of federal dollars allocated for this purpose.



Agriculture is vital to the future prosperity, health and character of Oregon. It is a huge driver for our economy, can provide clean air and water, may be a component of our efforts to tackle climate change and is a treasured part of our heritage and character. **Please help us ensure a future for farming by helping us support current and future generations of farmers through funding the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program in the amount of \$10 million.**

Sincerely,

Nancy J. Hamilton

Nancy J. Hamilton
Executive Director