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April 21, 2021

Senator Betsy Johnson
Senator Elizabeth Steiner Hayward
Representative Dan Rayfield
Tri-Chairs, Joint Ways & Means Committee

RE: OSU Statewide Public Service Programs

Dear Senators Johnson and Steiner Hayward and Representative Rayfield,

Columbia Gorge Fruit Growers is a non-profit tree fruit organization that represents 440 growers and 20 shippers in the Mid-Columbia region of Oregon where more than 225,000 tons of pears, apples and cherries are produced annually. We work in close partnership with OSU Mid-Columbia Agricultural Research and Extension Center, an “OSU Statewide” in Hood River, an important agriculture research relationship.

We are part of a diverse coalition that would like to share the importance of the Oregon State University Statewide Public Service Programs – the Agricultural Experiment Station, Extension Service, and Forest Research Laboratory – to the State of Oregon. Known as “The OSU Statewides,” these programs provide state-of-the-art research and outreach generated by scientists and extension agents to real-world problems.

Since March of 2020, these programs have responded to the realities of COVID-19 by adapting and innovating to continue address community and state needs. This fall, they also pivoted to serve the immediate needs of communities and economic sectors. The examples are numerous.

OSU Extension rose to meet the challenges in 2020 in several areas. They are providing COVID-19 education and outreach for all residents, particularly those in traditionally harder-to-reach communities, such as the Mam-speaking community in Lincoln County. They collaborated with the Oregon Army National Guard and Oregon Department of Agriculture to distribute 915,000 KN95 masks and 5,000 gallons of hand sanitizer for agricultural workers in 18 counties. During the Labor Day fires, Extension employees and volunteers, especially in our 4-H program, worked day and night rescuing livestock, then caring for the animals at more than a dozen county fairgrounds. Extension also helped coordinate hay donations for farmers and ranchers. The new Extension Fire Program presented post-fire webinars that drew hundreds of attendees.

The Agricultural Experiment Stations across the state have recognized that research is essential to the continuity of the state's food production line. The experiment stations quickly prioritized policies and procedures to protect researchers while still allowing them to continue critical work with crops, livestock and even offshore on boats. When smoke filled the state at the time of wine grape harvest, food science researchers created a process to test grapes and wine for impacts of smoke exposure. The Oregon Wine Board recognized this work with the 2021 the Industry Partner Award.

Scientists and foresters with the Forest Research Laboratory continue research in areas like forest management and fire resilience in newly adapted formats as the risk of wildfire does not stop with COVID-19. More than a dozen researchers are probing the 2020 wildfires' aftermath in a range of ways. Researchers are conducting stream studies in multiple western and southern Oregon watersheds and looking at fire's ramifications for biodiversity in a collection of southwestern Oregon forests. They are also assisting in post-fire forest planting and planning, including addressing and discussing questions around seed availability and appropriate seed zones, climate mitigation, and availability of seedlings. Additionally, modular mass timber structures, developed from OSU research, can be used as fire hardened housing or as temporary housing.

The Governor's Recommended Budget flatlined the Statewides funding. We are asking you to support \$158.5 million in operational funding for the OSU Statewides - \$84 million for Agricultural Experiment Station, \$61.9 million for the OSU Extension Service and \$12.6 million for the Forest Research Laboratory. This investment represents a 7.42% base funding level increase to the 2019-21 budget so the OSU Statewides can continue their essential work in Oregon.

We acknowledge the unique state of Oregon's economy and recognize the difficult decisions you will have to make in the months ahead. As a critical part of OSU's Land Grant mission to serve all corners of the state, we see this as a time to invest in programs, like the OSU Statewides, with a significant statewide impact.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mike Doke", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mike Doke
Executive Director
Columbia Gorge Fruit Growers