

May 10, 2021

Senator Lew Frederick
Representative Susan McLain
Co-chairs, Joint Ways & Means Subcommittee on Education
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Oregon State University Extension Funding

Dear Senator Frederick and Representative McLain,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the importance of the Oregon State University Extension Service. I currently serve as chair and am writing on behalf of the Extension Community Advisory Network (ECAN).

OSU Extension partners with communities in every county of Oregon and the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs to meet local challenges and help every Oregonian thrive. As one of the three Statewide Public Service Programs—along with the Oregon Agricultural Experiment Station and Oregon Forest Research Laboratory—Extension serves as a critical link between the university, Oregon’s communities, and a diverse network of community partners and collaborators.

OSU Extension hasn’t missed a beat during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nearly the entire workforce shifted to remote work over the course of a week last year while maintaining public access through email, phone, web meetings, the Extension website and the online Ask an Expert service.

Extension’s creative remote and virtual program delivery—including webinars, phone calls, texts, and hard copy mailings—have helped maintain connection and expanded access to critical information. For many online offerings, Extension educators report higher participation than they would have expected for an in-person event.

Now, more than ever, OSU Extension is serving a critical role in community resilience. Across all program focus areas and in all corners of the state, Extension educators have responded quickly with collaborative outreach to address emerging needs while continuing ongoing work.

Healthy communities and economies

After a COVID-19 outbreak in Newport, OSU Extension faculty and staff recognized that few resources were available in Spanish and the indigenous Guatemalan language Mam, both spoken by local residents. They began offering support with contract tracing in Spanish, and then public outreach in Spanish and Mam through videos, radio and other media.

An OSU Extension-developed high-speed hand-washing program originally designed for children in school settings was quickly adapted for adult audiences with consideration for cultural relevance in

the migrant and seasonal farmworker community. Revised materials and lesson plans in English and Spanish were shared with workers, employers, state agencies and community partners.

Extension shifted StrongWomen—its popular strength training program for middle-aged and older adults—to Zoom meetings for classes, made weights available for members to use at home, and revamped the StrongWomen website to include exercise videos that allow participants to follow along at home.

Thriving youth and families

Of the 109,000 Oregon youth served by Extension programs, more than 37,000 are in 4-H clubs. Examples of COVID-19 adapted 4-H programs included an online statewide animal science challenge, a virtual running club in Lake County to keep kids and families active, and a series of Facebook videos in Washington County that kept kids connected with home-based, hands-on learning activities.

OSU Extension engaged at the county level with 4-H families, volunteers, county elected officials, and community partners to provide for virtual or modified summer fair experiences that prioritized safety while offering opportunities for youth to evaluate their learning and showcase their accomplishments.

Resilient and productive forestry and natural ecosystems

OSU Extension's legislatively funded Fire Program responded to the September wildfires with post-fire resources in partnership with state and federal partners, including webinars that drew 6,500 people. The Fire Program continues to be a resource for the public, joining with the Oregon Department of Forestry, Office of the State Fire Marshal and Keep Oregon Green to launch this spring's "Fire Aware. Fire Prepared" campaign that features "Wildfire Wednesday" webinars.

COVID-19 forced cancellation of all three in-person Tree Schools in 2020. In response, Tree School events were provided online in a series of 35 webinars hosted by Extension in Clackamas County in collaboration with the Oregon Forest Resources Institute and the Oregon Partnership for Forestry Education. The webinars drew more than double the number of people than in-person events in 2019.

Sustainable agriculture, food systems, and gardening

Extension assisted with livestock rescue efforts as thousands of Oregonians fled wildfires in September. Fairgrounds in at least 12 counties were used as intake sites for horses, cattle, pigs, poultry and other animals, with 4-H livestock youth and adult volunteers caring for the animals. Extension also organized hay donations for farmers and ranchers who were impacted by the fires.

In May 2020, Extension locations served as distribution hubs for the state's massive PPE distribution to agricultural producers—a joint project of Oregon Department of Agriculture, Office of Emergency Management, Oregon National Guard, and Extension. The efforts resulted in the distribution of 915,000 KN95 masks and 5,000 gallons of hand sanitizer in 18 counties.

COVID-19 sent Oregon's \$700 million seafood industry scrambling to find new markets.

In response, Oregon Sea Grant's Extension fisheries specialists partnered with the Oregon Department of Agriculture and the Oregon seafood industry on an initiative called Eat Oregon Seafood, which features a webpage and a promotional campaign on social media.

Extension's Master Gardener Program had to adapt nearly overnight in the spring of 2020—at a time when more people than ever were turning to Master Gardeners for help. Oregon's corps of nearly 3,000 Master Gardener volunteers in 27 counties were able to be of direct service to more than 34,000 Oregonians while under COVID-related restrictions. In addition to their educational work, Master Gardeners donated an estimated 21 tons of fresh produce, harvested from Master Gardener-managed community and demonstration gardens, to local food banks and food pantries.

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.

I recognize the difficult decisions you will have to make. Please consider that maintaining the investment in OSU Extension will have a lasting impact on Oregon's people, communities, and industries.

The Statewides are a critical part of OSU's land grant mission, fully integrated with its teaching and research missions to serve the state. I urge that these critical programs do not take a disproportionate cut compared to other higher education accounts.

Sincerely,

Mark Labhart

Mark Labhart
Sisters, OR
Chair, Extension Community Advisory Network

cc. Senator Betsy Johnson, Senator Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, and Representative Dan Rayfield,
Co-Chairs Joint Ways & Means Committee

ECAN members

Michelle Kaseberg, ECAN Steering Committee,
Baker County

Tatiana Thompson, Benton County

Anne Goetze, ECAN Steering Committee,
Clackamas County

Kevin Leahy, ECAN Steering Committee,
Clatsop County

Scott Russell, Columbia County

Peggy Prickett, Coos County

Sue Williams, Crook County

Dan Sherwin, Crook County

Georgia Nowlin, Curry County

Steve Forster, Deschutes County

John Fine, Douglas County

Alec Oliver, Grant County

Angie Ketscher, Harney County

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Kevin Talbert, ECAN Steering Committee,
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Kevin Richards, Jefferson County

Valerie Switzler, Jefferson County,
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Pam Zaklan, Josephine County

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Grant Kitamura, Malheur County

Jared Hibbard-Swanson, Marion County

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Alex Paraskevas, Polk County

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Darcy Sexson, Umatilla County

Bob Durham, Wasco County

Hector Hinojosa, Washington County

Bill Klug, Washington County

Luis Nava, Washington County

Lynn Morley, Wheeler County

Helle Ruddenklau, ECAN Steering Committee,
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Leslie Lewis, Yamhill County, 4-H Program
Representative

Mike Weber, Jefferson County, Agriculture
Program Representative

Betty-Coe deBroekert, Lane County, Family
Community Health Program
Representative

Mike Barsotti, Lynn County, Forestry Program
Representative

Todd Nash, Wallowa County Commissioner,
Association of Oregon Counties
Representative

Craig Pope, Polk County Commissioner, ECAN
Steering Committee Chair-Elect,
Association of Oregon Counties
Representative