

March 31, 2023

House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water  
State Capitol  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support for Components 4-7 and 4-8 of HB 3124

Chair Helm, Vice-chairs Hartman and Owens, and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Components 4-7 and 4-8 of HB 3124, the Bipartisan Drought Relief and Water Security (BiDRAWS) Package. The Oregon Community Food System Network (OCFSN) is a 501(c)(3) food systems network of 59 Oregon nonprofit organizations and allies dedicated to strengthening local and regional food systems to deliver better economic, social, health, and environmental outcomes across the state. OCFSN is represented by a member-elected Leadership Team composed of food systems leaders from across the state.

In 2021, Oregon's producers endured multiple natural disasters including extreme heat, drought, and wildfires which are threatening their viability. To ensure that small and underserved producers, those producers who often fall through the cracks of federal and state support, have the opportunity to access timely disaster relief funding provided by the State, OCFSN was granted \$1.5 million to establish a Disaster Relief Fund under Senate Bill 5561, section 15. This Disaster Relief Fund provided direct financial support in the form of grants to small-scale farmers and ranchers impacted by natural disasters, who are not able to access federal disaster relief funds and/or the State's Forgivable Disaster Loan Program. The 2022 impact report for the Disaster Relief Fund is included at the end of this letter.

We know that extreme heat, drought, wildfires and other disasters will continue to impact Oregon's producers and our food system. In 2023, components 4-7 and 4-8 of the BiDRAWS Package build on the success of the Disaster Relief Fund and OCFSN strengths and relationships in delivering disaster relief and resilience support. These components will provide support to small farmers and the community food system in the face of the ongoing drought and related natural disasters. It is important that the state prioritizes food systems when thinking about drought resilience and planning for Oregon's changing water reality.

Component 4-7 creates a separate fund distributed by OCFSN for small farmers to gain drought resilience. The OCFSN has proven its ability to run this kind of program and its members are

trusted resources for new, small, and diverse farmers that do not traditionally take advantage of ODA programs. This is distinct from the ODA drought relief and resilience fund because:


- The OCFSN 2022 Disaster Relief fund prioritized BIPOC farmers and was only open to small farms with under \$300,000 of revenue.
- The OCFSN funds are grants, which are more accessible to small farms than the forgivable loans in the ODAP program.
- OCFSN is using a network of trusted organizations to reach farmers which has led to greater reach to underserved farmers not accessing other state or federal relief.
- OCFSN's application process was less burdensome paperwork-wise and involved more one-on-one attention from the grant administrator, so it was open to more new and first time farmers.

Component 4-8 creates resilience for our community food system sales outlets which will allow them to keep benefiting farmers and feeding communities even in the face of drought related disasters. Oregon Farmers Market Association (OFMA) and OCFSN's Food Hub Working Group coordinate and support Oregon's farmers markets and food hubs. These food outlets are important because:

- Farmers markets are essential businesses and in times of crisis (like the pandemic) when the centralized food system fails they provide safe, reliable access to crucial, nutritionally dense food for our communities.
- Farmers markets have millions of visitors each year and generate an estimated \$60M of sales each year according to OFMA's data.
- Food Hubs and farmers markets can serve as business incubators to help producers reach new customers, establish their brand, and grow into reliable sources of local food for their communities.
- Local and community food systems are good for rural economies. Encouraging this type of farming and these outlets supports the farms that, according to a study from OSU, create more jobs per \$1M in sales, put more money directly into the local economy, and generate more economic activity for other local businesses than commodity farms.

It is a good investment to prioritize community food systems and increase Oregon's resiliency. OCFSN is ready to work with the State to make these funds accessible and impactful. We ask for your support of HB 3124 and prioritization of components 4-7 and 4-8.

Sincerely,



Chantel Welch  
OCFSN Leadership Team Chair

# Farmer & Rancher Disaster Relief Grant 2022 Impact Report

With leadership from Our Family Farms, OSU Center for Small Farms & Community Food Systems, Oregon Oregon Climate & Agriculture Network, Friends of Family Farmers, High Desert Food & Farm Alliance and many others, the Oregon Community Food Systems Network (OCFSN) distributed nearly \$1.5 million of state funding in 2022 through the Farmer & Rancher Disaster Relief Grant Program to 108 farmers and ranchers impacted by natural disasters in 2021.

**\$1.5M**

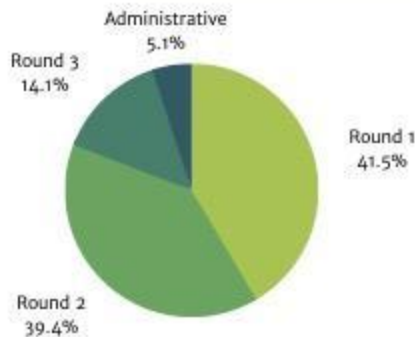
Total Fund

**108**

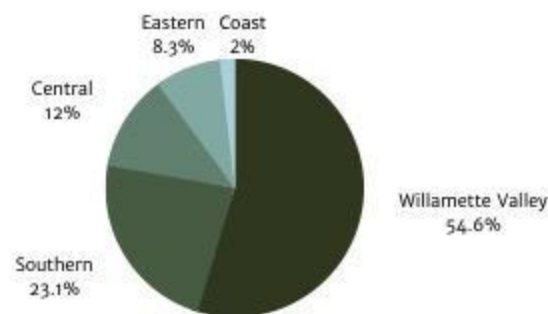
Grant Recipients

**38%**

Identified as BIPOC+

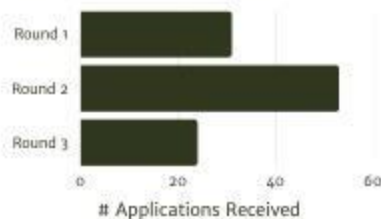


Distribution of Fund



Recipient Location

## Grant funds were distributed across three rounds



This allowed us to balance getting money to producers quickly and giving folks sufficient time to apply.

## Reasons for Requesting a Grant

Losses were caused by a variety of challenges, including:

- crop damage from heat waves
- loss of sales due to farmers market closures because of extreme heat or wildfire smoke
- early irrigation shut offs due to drought
- ice storm damage
- greenhouse damage from snow
- evacuating livestock to protect them from fires.

Oregon producers are on the frontlines of climate change.

Testimonials from producers who received funding highlighted how crucial this type of direct, accessible support was for them to continue farming in an unpredictable, rapidly changing climate. This is even more challenging for producers who don't have the resources to weather these events and are unable to access other state and federal disaster relief funds.

## Feedback 2022 Farmer & Rancher Disaster Relief Grant recipients shared with us:

"One thing that really stood out to me about this grant program was how beautifully streamlined and straightforward it was. Having applied to other grants in the past, there are many challenges navigating the complexities and immense amount of paperwork involved while trying to run a farm during the busy season. [Another grant application], for example, was pushing 50 pages and took several full weeks to complete. I can only imagine the kind of barriers that others would experience if English wasn't their first language or did not have the financial flexibility to dedicate so much time to the application."

"We were very pleased to hear that we were able to qualify for the Disaster Relief funds. As you know farmers are an independent bunch and reluctant to take a handout, but we are very appreciative of a helping hand from our neighbors when times are tough. The grant will help us to continue on during these times of high inflation and painful fuel prices."

"Thank you so much!! Although we had troubles in 2021...applying for this grant wasn't anything I thought I would be acknowledged in the running but with supportive pep talk from (a fellow BIPOC farmer), I gave it a go."

"A vote of confidence like this Disaster Relief has infused us with confidence and gratitude for this season after all the hardships of the last one. We received the news we got a grant after a very busy week that included planting a huge hedgerow on one of our property boundaries to support pollinators, biodiversity, and soil health. It means the world to us to do what we do, and the support of this grant will enable us to continue to grow and serve our community with reduced financial stress, and more clarity. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts."

