



House Committee on Agriculture,  
Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water  
900 Court St. NE,  
Salem Oregon 97301

*April 18, 2023*

## Testimony in Support of House Bill 3124

Thank you, Chairman Helm and Vice-Chairman Owens, and staff, for working on the drought relief package and including funding for irrigation modernization. My name is Julie O'Shea, and I am the Executive Director at Farmers Conservation Alliance, located in Hood River.

I want to call attention to the importance of match funding in this package for irrigation modernization, which is included as part of 6-1 in the proposal. I would also like to support the projects that were listed in 6-2. These projects would help modernize gaining infrastructure in the Klamath Basin and help manage senior water right claims in the Basin.

Right now, in the State of Oregon, there are nine irrigation districts that have secured close to \$48 million in federal funding for construction but are unable to fully implement projects until non-federal match is in hand. These districts are in the Hood River, Deschutes, Owyhee, Klamath, and Rogue Basins. In addition, FCA is engaged in a slew of projects slated to finish planning in the upcoming biennium and will begin the process of securing federal funds. The early estimates for these projects show that there is a potential to unlock an additional \$85 million in federal funding if districts can access readily available matching funds from the state. These districts with projects in development are in Umatilla, Powder Valley, Santiam, Owyhee, Klamath, Deschutes, and Hood River Basins.

The generational funding packages that Congress passed, including the Inflation Reduction Act and Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act, as well as annual appropriations legislation, means there will be unprecedented opportunities in the coming years to leverage resources as federal agencies begin allocating billions of federal infrastructure dollars for irrigation modernization and drought resiliency across the west. Irrigation districts that have match in hand will be in a strong position for these funds.

I also want to highlight that irrigation modernization projects are about more than just funding and construction. These projects provide multiple benefits to farmers, watersheds, and local communities. They help increase drought resiliency and ensure that farmers have

more reliable water deliveries to grow the crops and livestock we rely on to feed ourselves every day. These projects also produce benefits for watersheds, and in many cases ESA-listed species, by conserving water and/or improving water quality that improves habitat and protects flows. Some projects can also reduce energy demand by eliminating the need to pump water and, in certain situations, open up opportunities to generate local, renewable hydro or solar energy. In addition, since most irrigation infrastructure is over one hundred years old, there is a growing threat to our communities from breaches in canal walls. Modernization greatly reduces these types of events.

Finally, it is also important to highlight that irrigation modernization projects do not happen during a single state biennium. These projects stretch over many years and must factor in planning, design, engineering, and short construction seasons. The funding in this package supports pre-planning and early design work. Funding for these activities is vital to ensuring that the development of multi-benefit projects continues well into the future.

I encourage the committee to pass this critical drought funding package and ensure that funding for irrigation modernization match is included. Thank you for considering the position of Oregon's irrigation communities on this important piece of legislation.