

Submitter: Kiara Kashuba

On Behalf
Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Natural
Resources

Measure: HB5002

Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Natural Resources
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

March 13, 2023

Co-Chairs Senator Dembrow and Representative Pham and members of the
Committee

I am writing on behalf of the Gorge Farmer Collective, a farmer-owned cooperative, in support of the request to include the Farm to School Equipment and Infrastructure Grant Program in the Oregon Department of Agriculture's budget. This Grant program provides funding for food producers to access necessary equipment to meet the demands of the school marketplace.

Gorge Farmer Collective (GFC) is a farmer-owned distribution cooperative in the Columbia River Gorge. We are comprised of 50 different farmers, ranchers, fishers, and value-added food businesses. We aggregate and distribute locally grown and processed foods direct to consumer, to restaurants, hospitals, food banks, and school districts. We received this grant funding in 2022-2023 to purchase the warehousing and distribution infrastructure and equipment necessary to increase our Farm to School sales while maintaining food and staff safety. Thanks to this grant funding, we have a commercial freezer, a liftgate, shelving, pallet jacks and other storage equipment, and made vital improvements to our warehouse space. These assets have greatly increased our capacity to sell local food from dozens of small farms to school district and early care center markets. We would not have been able to afford these pieces of critical infrastructure without this funding.

GFC supports this grant program because it addresses a significant barrier for small and mid-sized producers selling to schools. Providing the opportunity for small farms to upgrade their infrastructure in a way that increases their ability to scale up and successfully reach school markets is invaluable and helps create a resilient state-wide food economy.

I ask that you support including this grant program in the Oregon Department of Agriculture's budget at \$500,000 as previously requested in ODA's Agency Request

Budget. Thank you for your time.

Kiara Kashuba, Director
Gorge Farmer Collective
Mosier, OR