



Friends of Family Farmers ♦ PO Box 751 ♦ Junction City, OR 97448

503-581-7124 ♦ [www.FriendsofFamilyFarmers.org](http://www.FriendsofFamilyFarmers.org)

Dear Co-chairs Sen. Dembrow and Rep. Pham, and members of the committee:

I am writing today on behalf of Friends of Family Farmers (FoFF) to express our gratitude for the inclusion of many of our priority programs in HB 5002 and the proposed Oregon Department of Agriculture Budget. FoFF represents more than 1600 small and midsize, highly diversified farmers who prioritize local and regional markets. We have also been working with our coalitions within the Oregon Community Food System Network to highlight the work done in this space most important to a thriving community food system here in Oregon.

Before speaking about specific programs and packages that are important to the folks we serve, I wanted to highlight something that was said in the informational hearings on this proposal over the last couple days. In response to Rep. Pham's questions a representative from the department reminded the committee that *"ODA does not receive funding from the state that specifically supports local and regional food systems. Unlike international trade activities that are directly funded by federal dollars, the ODA market access program doesn't receive general funds to support developing, marketing or promoting resilient local food systems."* This should be top of mind when deciding how to prioritize state funds. Oregon has a duty to use state funds to protect and elevate the resilient local food system. We are so lucky to have a long history and thriving community of small and midsize farmers; some of the most robust farmers markets, food hubs, and community supported agriculture networks in the country; and a high demand for local food across the board. Here are the programs represented in the budget that make the most difference to those producers.

### **Meat Processing**

We have known about the bottleneck of meat processing in our state for decades. Without the essential services that inspected slaughter and processing facilities provide, farmers and ranchers cannot bring their product to market. Although this was exacerbated during the pandemic and laid plain by the empty grocery store shelves, this will need to be a long term priority to bring processing capacity in line with production here in our state. The farmers we serve report wait times of 12-18 months for appointments and many facilities are disincentivized from working with small producers because of the high costs of the industry. We applaud the work already done in this arena, and we look forward to being partners as we continue to move toward a future where processing infrastructure is not a barrier to production.

### **Package 220: State Meat Inspection Program**

ODA has done so much good work since 2020 in developing the Oregon State Meat Inspection program and getting it authorized by the USDA. This program represents an Oregon specific solution for producers looking to sell their meat within the state and will help provide viable processing options for local market farmers. This package includes funding for four inspector

positions. This is a great start, is absolutely essential to our farmers, ranchers and food supply, and should be expanded in the future.

#### Package 250: Meat Infrastructure Grant Fund

In addition to more inspectors, funding for expanded facilities is necessary for true movement on this problem. The Meat Processing Infrastructure Grant Fund was originally funded in 2021 for \$2M. When the applications opened in 2022, more than \$14M of shovel ready requests came in representing more than \$35M of total investment in our state's meat processing infrastructure. This program needs to be funded both through this ODA budget request, and HB 2907 which is also before this committee. More processing facilities and slots are the only way to provide a stable future to Oregon's independent livestock producers.

#### **Farmer Opportunity Resources**

There is a need in Oregon (and across the country) to address the much maligned "get big or get out" paradigm of agriculture by creating opportunities for small producers and those from historically disadvantaged backgrounds to raise their voices, and get resources to fill the need for local food and resilient community food systems.

#### Package 420: Farm to School Infrastructure Grants

This is a program that was previously held in the Department of Education Budget and then transferred to the ODA for disbursement. Moving this program into the ODA budget from the beginning will help streamline this process, allow for more expertise in agricultural production to inform grant timelines and better serve our farmers. Farm to School is a program which puts more local food into schools through meal programs, and these grants help small producers scale appropriately to meet the logistical needs of institutional clients. This not only helps them sell into the Farm to School Program, but will lead to a more resilient core of small and midsize farms ready to step up to supply restaurants, company offices, grocery stores and other bulk oriented outlets. Please prioritize this program.

#### Package 430: Agricultural Opportunity Grants

This program specifically provides funding for farmers from traditionally disadvantaged groups. Because of Oregon's past of racist and exclusionary laws regarding land ownership and residence, farmers of color have faced more barriers in access to land, generational wealth and have not been afforded the same opportunity to build intergenerational farming knowledge in this state. These grants will help current BIPOC producers thrive in Oregon and help keep more folks in the next generation of farmers (the most diverse we have yet seen) in business here in Oregon in the future.

#### **Technical Assistance and Resource Management**

##### Package 350: The Soil Health Program

The Soil Health program and the specialist associated with it are incredibly valuable resources for the farmers I serve. Soil is the essential building block of all things agriculture. As more and more farmers are paying attention to the health of the soil ecosystems, the demands for those

services are rising every year. Soil health practices and specialists at ODA who can advise on them benefit every producer in every sector of agriculture, no matter what you are growing or raising. This is critical for the future of Oregon's agricultural production and should not only be maintained, but expanded. This is also an opportunity for the state to invest in a program that will allow it to bring lots of federal funds to Oregon in the future. We need to build our program to better serve this need in the future. The item here should be funded in conjunction with the expansions proposed in HB 2998 as well.

Thank you for all the consideration for the programs above and we look forward to continuing Oregon's commitment to small and midsize producers across the state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alice Morrison". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Alice Morrison  
Co-Director  
Friends of Family Farmers