

Co-Chairs Senator Dembrow and Representative Pham and members of the Committee, for the record my name is Jeffrey Aichele, owner of Aichele Berry Farms in Stanfield, OR

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of the Farm to School Equipment and Infrastructure Grant Program being included 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.

I support this grant program because it addresses a significant barrier for small and mid-sized producers selling to schools. For small farms like ours, critical infrastructure is often the bottleneck in developing healthy local relationships with our schools. In our case, receiving the equipment and infrastructure grant was the single most important key to working with schools across the state.

We are a small, family owned strawberry farm in north eastern Oregon. We received this grant funding to greatly expand our cold storage space in order to provide a better product for our schools. In the fall of 2022, it really paid off. We experienced a bumper crop of strawberries, and with the help of the folks at the Oregon Farm to School I was able to contact additional school districts and get them sold. In the month of September, we sold nearly \$60,000 worth of strawberries to over 10 different school districts across Oregon. Without the support of the equipment and infrastructure grant, we simply would not have been able to store our fruit and much of it would have rotted in the field. Instead, we were able to provide Oregon strawberries to kids in September, and I got to read dozens of hand drawn thank you cards from all across the state.

I ask that you support adding back this grant program into the Oregon Department of Agriculture's budget. Thank you for your time.