

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

To Co-Chairs Senator Frederick and Representative McLain and members of the Committee,

My name is Corey Pierson. I am a Food Systems Educator with a non-profit called Growing Gardens running gardening, cooking, and environmental action extracurricular clubs at David Douglas High School in Portland. I am writing in support of keeping the budget for the Oregon Farm to School grant program at its current level of \$10.2 million.

When I was in school, I was lucky enough to have access to garden programming from 2nd grade all the way up until 12th. Those clubs and programs were never state funded, always paid for only by one or two passionate teachers, and were an essential part of my development. The garden was a place where I had agency, and my decisions mattered. Learning about what plants grow best where and why, applying that knowledge to help plan our school garden, then getting to harvest the literal fruits of that learning and labor was a tangible and positive feedback loop that my classroom education often lacked. They also gave me a physical outlet outside of sports, a source of free vegetables for myself and my family, and a calming environment to retreat to when the intense emotions and experiences of adolescence got to be too much.

After just a year of working at David Douglas, I see those same benefits for my students. We donate most of our harvest to the school food pantry, providing free organic vegetables for a large community with many low income families. The rest of the food either gets taken home by students, whose parents appreciate the free veg, or is used in our Cooking Club, which teaches students how to use what we grow to cook dishes that they can make at home. With our budget, we are able to take students on field trips to gardens and farms, bring in local farmers and chefs as guest speakers, and hire students during the summer for a paid gardening internship. According to student feedback, many come simply to be in a relaxing environment in an otherwise stressful place. Others feel that they learn more useful skills in our clubs than they learn in their classes. I even have a former student intern who chose to pursue horticulture in college next year after doing the internship. In the long term, exposing students to food systems and growing skills will lead to more students choosing careers in agriculture and other food systems careers like my intern and even myself. Those who don't go into food careers will still bolster the resiliency of our Oregon food system by being educated in growing their own food.

Maintaining the Farm to School budget has many other tangible economic, environmental, and health benefits. But as an educator, my biggest reason to keep it at \$10.2 million is that our students enjoy and benefit from our programming. Keeping that funding allows us not only to maintain our current programs, but to expand into new high schools and middle schools. I hope that the committee considers keeping the Farm to School budget, and I thank you for your time and attention.

-Corey Pierson