



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

3/20/2023

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

I am writing on behalf of FoodCorps in **support of the Farm to School Grant Program in the Oregon Department of Education's budget.** This Grant program provides critical funding for schools and early childhood education programs to purchase Oregon foods, hands-on farm and garden education programs, equipment and infrastructure for food producers and technical assistance for the farm to school community. Sustaining the current level of \$10.2 million dollars will support dependable business relationships between schools and food producers and maintain consistent educational programs that connect students to agriculture and nutrition.

FoodCorps partners with schools and communities to nourish kids' health, education, and sense of belonging. Our 200 AmeriCorps members across the country, and eight in Oregon, serve alongside educators and school nutrition leaders to provide kids with nourishing meals, food education, and culturally affirming experiences with food that celebrate and nurture the whole child. All five of the school districts we partner with in Oregon have built relationships with local producers, and increased access to hands-on food education, through Oregon's Farm to School Grant Program.

Oregon is a national leader in providing students with access to more nourishing school meals that put dollars in the pockets of Oregon farmers. The COVID pandemic has made clear the importance of local purchasing for schools, as shorter distances between producers and consumers ensured resiliency to supply chain shocks and severe disruption during the pandemic. When our school partners are able to buy tamales from the restaurant of a parent in their district, or apples from the orchard that shares a fence with their school, that investment creates a more robust local food system.

We also know that providing funding for food education is necessary to ensure those meals are eaten. A typical U.S. student receives fewer than 8 hours of nutrition education in school per year, and too rarely is that education integrated or hands-on in the ways we know nurture healthy eating habits. Research that FoodCorps performed in partnership with Columbia University shows that kids in schools with more FoodCorps hands-on learning activities eat up to 3 times as many of those local fruits and vegetables as students who receive less of that hands-on learning. Oregon's Grant Program helps schools treat cafeterias like classrooms, and connect student's experience with school meals to learning in the classroom & garden.

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The funding this grant program offers also changes families home food habits. After one of our service members in Lakeview led a lesson where students cooked with rutabagas, she went to their local grocery store where the clerk asked her what she'd been teaching that week. When she told him, he laughed and told her that for the first time ever, they had been sold out of rutabagas all week.

Oregon's Farm to School Grant Program is specifically designed to support producers and schools across each step in the school food supply chain, and it's the model many other states look to as they design their farm to school programs. Procurement dollars give schools the funds to purchase local foods. Our innovative producer infrastructure grants offer producers an opportunity to scale and develop products for schools. Education funds ensure students eat the local foods on their lunch tray. Technical assistance funds make sure each partner in this supply chain has all of the tools they need to be successful. **Cutting program funding makes it harder for this unique system of supports to work together.**

FoodCorps is proud to be part of a broad coalition of partners who support including this grant program in the Oregon Department of Education's budget at the current level of \$10.2 million so this program can continue to support healthy kids, schools and communities. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Aaron Poplack

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Portland, OR