

Submitter: Halle Riddlebarger

On Behalf Of: Medford Food Co-op

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Education

Measure: HB5014

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

My name is Halle Riddlebarger and I'm writing on behalf of Medford Food Co-op.

Medford Food Co-op is a local community-owned grocery store located in Medford, Oregon. The Co-op is cooperatively-owned by more than 4,800 community members. We feature organic produce from local farmers and a variety of local and regional products, from fresh produce to bulk goods to beer and wine. We exist to sustain a vibrant, healthy community and a thriving local, organic food economy.

We are writing today 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.

Medford Food Co-op owners and shoppers support our local Rogue Valley Farm to School organization's work to educate children about our food system through hands-on farm and garden programs, and by increasing local foods in school meals. They work to inspire an appreciation of local agriculture that improves the economy and environment of our community and the health of its members. Rogue Valley Farm to School has been an essential player in our local food system through their work to expand opportunities for local growers, and they've been a vital resource for community members as our region continues to recover from the pandemic and wildfires.

Medford Food Co-op supports this grant program because we believe educating children about where their food comes from and the connection local agriculture has to the health of individuals, the local economy, and the environment is vital to creating and maintaining a strong local food system and vibrant local food economy.

We ask that you 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,  
Halle Riddlebarger  
Outreach Manager  
Medford Food Co-op