

Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Testimony By Suzanne Briggs, Portland Oregon
Farm to School Grant Program Funding

April 8, 2023

Chairs Steiner and Sanchez and Members of the Committee, my name is Suzanne Briggs. I live here in Portland. In 2006, a diverse group of stakeholders from health care providers, public health, agriculture and related non-profits gathered to create the Oregon Farm to School and School Garden Network. I was one of those stakeholders, and in 2009 we secured our first Farm to School Grant funding. Over the past 10 years, I have led and volunteered in school gardens programs within Portland Public Schools and the Multnomah Education Schools District schools.

I am testifying today to urge you to maintain the Farm to School Grant Program's current full funding level at \$10.2 million dollars. Any cuts to this program would have a significant impact on the success of the program. This Grant program provides essential 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.

From the beginning our vision was to put Oregon food on Oregon school lunch tables. The barriers were high for local farmers and food processors to sell into local school districts. Thanks to the Oregon Farm to School Grants, local farmers and schools have better systems in place to build strong relationships and increase Oregon's food and agriculture economy.

But changing out the food on students' plates was not enough. For the founding members, it was equally important to educate students about how the food was grown, where and by whom. No better place to truly understand the value of food on one's plate than planting seeds in a school garden or visiting a local farm.

I ask that you support including this grant program in the Oregon Department of Education's budget. Sustaining the current level of funding at \$10.2 million will support established, dependable business relationships between schools and food producers, and maintain consistent farm and garden educational programs. Thank you for your time.

Suzanne Briggs
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