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12 April, 2023

Co-Chairs Dembrow and Pham, and Members
Joint Subcommittee on Natural Resources,
Joint Ways and Means Committee
State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support for Full Funding for the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAH)
POP 215 (\$10 million grant funding) and 115 (\$800,000 administrative)

Dear Co-Chairs Dembrow and Pham, and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of full funding for the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAH). 1000 Friends of Oregon is a nonprofit, membership organization that has worked with Oregonians for more than 45 years to support livable urban and rural communities; protect family farms, forests and natural areas; and provide transportation and housing choices.

Agriculture is the state's 2nd largest economic sector, and it drives the economies of both rural and urban communities across the state. We created our Food Systems Program in 2015 to expand our work with partner organizations throughout the state that are working together to build and strengthen robust and healthy food systems across Oregon. Success in achieving that goal is heavily dependent of retaining the productive capacity of the right amount of the right types of farmland, in the right places.

Oregon's land use planning program is one of the tools we rely on to protect productive farm and ranch land. However, this program is only as strong as the political will to keep it in place, and over the years since its creation nearly 60 uses have been allowed on farmland, gradually weakening the protections provided. (These uses and their impacts on farming were detailed in a [recent report by 1000 Friends](#).) At the same time, Oregon faces an unprecedented transfer of ownership of agricultural land in the coming decades as a significant percentage of our farmers retire and pass their land on to others.

It was in recognition of these factors that the legislature created the Oregon Agricultural OAH in 2017. Although the program was created with bipartisan support, it only received administrative funding to develop rules until grant programs were funded for the first time in last year's short legislative session at \$5 million for use in the remaining 1 year of the biennium.

This \$5 million investment almost immediately helped the state leverage an additional \$6 million in federal match for easement projects.

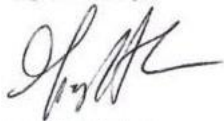
OAHP received 28 letters of interest for the easement program and 2 applications for the conservation management plan program; application totals exceeded available funds. The projects that were submitted cover the state, from Curry Co. to Columbia Co. to Lake Co. and in between. Many farmer and rancher applicants have already made significant personal investments in restoring habitat on their properties - both because of the landowner's dedication to conservation and because conserving water and soil benefits both agriculture and habitat. Some easements would help continue a multigenerational tradition, and some easements would help first generation or young farmers and ranchers pay off a mortgage or purchase land.

There is clearly significant additional demand for this program. In addition, the current Farm Bill allocates \$450 million per year in federal match funding for agricultural easements. If Oregon is to be able to leverage current and future funds, we need to continue to provide a sustainable state match.

We ask that the committee reinsert POP 215 (\$10 million in grant funding) and POP 115 (\$800,000 in administrative costs) for OAHP into OWEB's budget. The need for this funding is urgent, and it has been proven to leverage significant additional funding and have a ripple-effect across the agricultural sector and across the state.

Thank you for consideration of our comments.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Greg Holmes', written over a faint rectangular stamp.

Greg Holmes
Food Systems Program Director
1000 Friends of Oregon