



WEST MULTNOMAH
Soil & Water Conservation District

Joint Committee on Ways and Means: Subcommittee on Natural Resources

Re: Public Testimony for SB 5539 – Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP) Funding

April 19, 2023

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Dembrow and Representative Pham and Committee Members:

On behalf of the West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District, I urge you to adopt Senate Bill 5539 and reinsert funding for the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program via POP 215 and POP 115.

As a special district governed by elected officials, our mission is to provide resources, information, and expertise to improve air and water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and soil health on agricultural and natural lands. Oregon's agricultural lands are key to protecting clean water and air, healthy wildlife habitats, and providing locally grown food and local jobs.

Parcelization and development pose real threats to the viability of our working agricultural lands now and in the future. Oregon lost 340,000 acres from agricultural production during the last USDA Agricultural Census (2012-2017), a three-fold increase over the previous census. This is an alarming trend that must be slowed.

Every year, Oregon farms contribute over 680,000 jobs, \$29.71 billion in annual wages, \$12.12 billion in taxes, and \$2.85 billion in agricultural product exports from the state (Oregon Department of Agriculture, 2022). Millions of people eat the food grown on Sauvie Island farms, local community gardens, and surrounding agricultural land from our own West Multnomah District. It is critical for our local economy, and for equitable access to fresh and healthy food, that we actively work to keep this land in agricultural use and protect it from future development through succession planning. Eighty percent of Oregon farmers don't have succession plans in place, and it is estimated that over 60% of today's agricultural land will change ownership in the next 20 years – and a lot of that land may be turned into other uses and paved over.

The Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP) provides the necessary solutions to protect agricultural land, but it requires state funding in order to succeed.

We strongly urge you to reinsert into OWEB's budget POP 215 (\$10 million for grants) and POP 115 (\$800,000 for program administration) to support OAHP's programming to protect our farmlands, local economy, and the very identity of Oregon.

Sincerely,

Terri Preeg Riggsby,
Chair and Zone 5 Director
West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District