

Deschutes Land Trust

210 NW IRVING AVENUE, SUITE 102
BEND, OREGON 97703
OFFICE: (541) 330-0017
DESCHUTESLANDTRUST.ORG



CONSERVATION. COMMUNITY. CARING FOR THE LAND.

April 20, 2023

To: Joint Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Natural Resources
From: Deschutes Land Trust
RE: **Support of Full Funding for the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program**

Co-Chairs Sen. Dembrow and Rep. Pham and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of fully funding the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP) by reinserting POP 215 (\$10M in grant funding) and POP 115 (\$80K in administrative costs) into the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board's (OWEB) 2023-2025 budget. Growth pressure and an aging farmer and rancher population are threatening to break up Oregon's large, in-tact farms that provide vital habitat for our fish and wildlife resources and serve as cornerstones of the state's rural economies. Providing grants for succession planning, conservation planning and working lands easements, OAHP provides farmers and ranchers important alternatives to conversion that are not duplicated elsewhere in state programs.

Deschutes Land Trust works to conserve and care for the lands and waters that sustain Central Oregon so that local communities and the natural world can flourish together for generations to come and protecting intact farms, ranches and forestlands is one of our core areas of focus. To date we have worked with willing landowners to protect over 7,000 acres of working lands from fragmentation and have projects in development that would conserve over 20,000 additional acres. The state matching funds provided by OAHP for these projects is vital to securing the federal funding sources these projects need to come to fruition. Last year alone, when the legislature allocated \$5 million to OAHP, it leveraged a record federal investment of \$6.7 million in agricultural easement funding for Oregon.

OAHP is a tremendous asset that has broad benefits for the different farms, ranches and geographies across our state. Just this year, in OAHP's momentous first round of grants, the program was able to fund seven agricultural protection projects that included a legacy ranch at the mouth of the Elk River on the South Coast and a Southeast Oregon ranch that protects some of our best sage grouse habitat. The Land Trust encourages the Committee to fully fund the OAHP as initially proposed under OWEB's Agency Recommended Budget.

Sincerely,



Natasha Bellis

Conservation Director