

Submitter: Rebecca Slosberg  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means  
Measure: SB5506

Co-Chairs and members of the Committee, my name is Rebecca Slosberg. I am co-executive director for Rogue Valley Farm to School

I am testifying today in support of full funding at the current level of \$10.2 million dollars for the Farm to School Grant Program included in the Oregon Department of Education's budget. This Grant program provides 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.

I support farm to school because I see the positive impacts that Farm to School programs have on children and our communities. When I envision a healthy thriving community, I see all students eating healthy locally grown food at school. Spending time in a school garden learning to grow food, prepare whole from scratch food and snacks. Getting to spend time outside connecting to the earth, their peers, their teacher and a garden educator that knows them and sees their strengths. Visiting farms where their food is grown, getting to harvest and prepare food on a farm. Oregon Farms and producers are thriving, people in the community know who grows their food and appreciates the growers and farm workers.

Farm to School funding moves us towards this goal. Rogue Valley Farm to School works to build this culture of health in the schools in our region. With grant funding we provide farm and garden and nutrition programs. We also support other organizations and schools as the regional hub to apply and use their grant funds. Working with schools and growers takes time to build relationships, in takes trust. We have decades long relationships with producers to support and encourage them to sell to schools.

2 years ago we undertook an in depth program evaluation conducting one of one interviews with over 30 teachers, principals, superintendents and nutrition directors. We found that on top of providing healthy food and new skills it helped students build resilience coming out of a pandemic and a devastating fire. The garden, farm and cafeteria are ideal places to connect with students and improve mental health. When we work with students we are supporting their emotional and social learning. Our garden educators know them, care about them, help them to be resilient in the face of challenge. Helping then learn to work together, to support one another to take care of the garden, to communicate with each other, to find what they enjoy and be part of something important in their community.

It is crucial that we continue to build on the relationships we are cultivating. Reduced funding would have a direct impact on the work we do and would impact schools, students and local producers. We are working really hard to continue to reach more students to have a deeper impact, to improve what we do. We can not do this without the ODE funding.

I ask that you support including this grant program in the Oregon Department of Education's budget at \$10.2 million. Thank you for your time.