



**YAMHILL SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

February 1, 2024

Dear Senator Brian Boquist and Representative Lucetta Elmer,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Yamhill Soil and Water Conservation District, we extend our resounding support of, and ask you to help fund, the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program, or OAHP.

This program was developed by conservation and agricultural organizations in 2017 to provide four grant programs that address conservation on working lands, keeping those lands in production, and helping future generations (including first-generation farmers) access agricultural land. These grants include conservation management planning, working land conservation easements, support for familial and non-familial farm transfers, and technical assistance for support organizations, and they're managed by the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board.

It has never been harder to farm in Oregon, in part because land prices are inflated by development speculation. OAHP's working land easement grant program in particular allows landowners to sell development rights that they wouldn't use anyway. This not only permanently protects the land for agriculture and associated habitat, and helps farmers access capital, but it makes the land more affordable for future generations, including many first-generation and BIPOC farmers and ranchers who find it difficult to afford land at inflated prices.

OAHP needs to be funded in the short session because we are at risk of losing \$7.2 million in federal matching funds that have been received, but must be returned if match is not available this year. Twenty-eight other states have similar easement matching grant programs, and our neighboring states all invest in their match program at higher rates than Oregon. The \$5 million the program received in 2022 protected 12,480 acres on 7 farms and ranches across the state and provided benefits including helping first-generation farmers purchase land, and helping farmers make efficiency improvements.

For these reasons and more, I respectfully urge you to support \$10.8 million in funding for OAHP in the 2024 short session. This funding request will come as House Bill 4060, a committee bill from the House Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources and Water Committee.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the District Board,

Barbara Boyer
District Chair