



February 5, 2024

Re: Support for HB 4060 - Funding for the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP)

Chair Helm, Vice-Chairs Hartman and Owens, Members of the Committee:

I'm writing as the Executive Director of Oregon Agricultural Trust to ask you to **fund the [Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program \(OAHP\)](#) at \$10.8 million this legislative session.**

This program was developed by conservation and agricultural organizations to provide 4 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 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 would be returned if matching funds are not secured. Still more dollars could be brought in for additional projects if OAHP were funded at the \$10.8 million request. Twenty-eight other states have similar easement matching grant programs, and our neighboring states all invest in their match programs 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.

Oregon Agricultural Trust (OAT), has seen significant demand for this program. We received 3 grants in the first grant cycle and have at least 7 more that we would apply for if funding were available. Last year alone we protected ~28,000 acres of agricultural land, and early this year we expect to protect another 40,000, with 100,000 more acres in the pipeline. Landowners are using this program to pass their land and businesses to family and non-family members, increase business viability, and make land more affordable for first-generation farmers.

For these reasons and more, **I respectfully urge you to vote yes on HB 4060 to support \$10.8 million in funding for OAHP in the 2024 short session.**



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Thank you for your service,

Nellie McAdams
Executive Director