



February 6, 2024

Representative Ken Helm
Chair, House Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources and Water Committee
900 Court St NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support for the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program

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

My name is Amy Wong, and I am the Board Chair of the Oregon Organic Coalition (OOC). The OOC was founded by organic leaders over 15 years ago to build unified support for organic advocacy. The OOC has brought together businesses, farmers, organizations, and other stakeholders to provide direction, advocacy, and support for activities that promote and grow organic practices and the trade in Oregon and beyond.

The OOC is writing in enthusiastic support of HB 4060, which provides funding for the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP). OAHP is a critical program to support conservation efforts on working lands in Oregon. The program began 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. The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board is in charge of managing these grants, which include conservation management planning, working land conservation easements, support for familial and non-familial farm transfers, and technical assistance for support organizations.

In Oregon, farming has never been more challenging, in part due to inflated land prices brought on by development speculation. OAHP's working land easement grant program 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 also 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 must be funded this session, or we are at risk of losing \$7.2 million in federal matching funds that have been received. If no state investment is made, the federal funding is at risk of being returned. Twenty-eight states have similar easement matching grant programs, including our neighboring states. The \$5 million the program received in 2022 protected 12,480 acres on seven farms and ranches across the state and provided important benefits, which include helping first-generation farmers purchase land and helping farmers make efficiency improvements.

OOC urges your support of HB 4060.

Amy Wong
Board Chair, Oregon Organic Coalition