



ROGUE FARM CORPS

PO Box 86024 | Portland OR 97286 | www.roguefarmcorps.org | 541-588-3550

February 8, 2024

Dear Chair Helm, Vice Chairs Owens and Hartman, and members of the committee:

My name is Matt Gordon and I am a Co-Executive Director of Rogue Farm Corps, a statewide non-profit that trains and equips beginning farmers in Oregon. I am writing on behalf of Rogue Farm Corps today in support of the Oregon Agricultural Heritage program and HB 4060. OAHP is the beginning of an investment that the state needs to make if it is truly going to support Oregon's community food systems and agricultural future. The conservation management plan and conservation easement portions of the program are great examples of supporting the farmer driven desire to protect the ecosystems of our working lands in harmony with food production. We should make these tools available to as many farmers as possible.

I am personally invested in this topic because I used to be a small beginning farmer myself, and because Rogue Farm Corps assists hundreds of small and beginning farmers around the state. I left my farming career partly because of the financial challenges of not having secure access to appropriate farmland for the business. We continually find in surveys of small and beginning farmers, who provide the backbone and future of our sustainable, local, and resilient food systems, that access to land due to affordability is one of the biggest challenges they face.

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.

There are not enough tools available to keep Oregon's farmland in production and help farmers afford to buy farmland. Conservation easements are one of the only widely used tools we are aware of that can permanently lower the cost of accessing farmland. Conservation management plans allow farmers and land stewards to enact the needed restoration and maintenance projects to keep the farm ecosystem functioning and keep our agricultural land viable for generations to come. We are so lucky to have a vibrant community food system here in Oregon and we need to invest in it to keep it viable. This is not the only path forward and we need to continue to find creative, equitable and truly sustainable solutions to our land access crisis, but this is a place to start. Thank you to the committee members and chair who have prioritized this bill and the Oregon Ag Heritage Program. I urge you to support this vital program for the sake of Oregon's communities, land and agricultural future. We need to fund OAHP in the short session because we are at risk of losing \$7.2 million in federal matching funds if we do not, and because our neighbor states all invest in the program at higher rates than Oregon.



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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matt Gordon". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. It is placed on a light gray rectangular background.

Matt Gordon
Co-Executive Director of Programs & Operations
Rogue Farm Corps
PO Box 86024
Portland OR 97286