

Deschutes Land Trust

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CONSERVATION. COMMUNITY. CARING FOR THE LAND.

January 22, 2025

To: House Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water Committee

From: Deschutes Land Trust

RE: Support for HB 3131 and \$17.3 M for the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program in 2025-2027 Budget

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

The Deschutes Land Trust (DLT) writes to you today in strong support for HB 3131 and its \$17.3 million in funding the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP) in the 2025 Oregon Legislative Session. OAHP helps Oregon leverage a remarkable 2:1 federal match through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and protects working ranch and farmlands for their agriculture and natural resource values.

Deschutes Land Trust works to conserve and care for the lands and waters that sustain Central Oregon so that local communities and the natural world can flourish together for generations to come. Protecting intact farms, ranches and forestlands from fragmentation is one of our core areas of focus as these working lands define Central Oregon's landscapes and communities. To date, we have worked with willing landowners to protect over 7,000 acres of agricultural lands from development, enhancing fish and wildlife habitat and strengthening rural agricultural economies. With reliable state match from OAHP, we can protect an additional 18,000 acres in the near future. Without OAHP funding, DLT risks losing \$1M already allocated to our projects through NRCS.

Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program has the added benefit of helping Oregon reach its climate action goals by reducing carbon emissions—protecting farmlands while growing cities in a compact manner reduces 33 tons of greenhouse gas emissions per acre per year when compared to sprawl development—and providing technical assistance to farmers to adopt climate-friendly agricultural practices. The Climate Action Commission has repeatedly recommended funding of OAHP as an important part of natural and working lands climate mitigation.

Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program is a tremendous asset to our state. With \$17.3 M in state funding for OAHP, Oregon can leverage already awarded federal dollars to invest in our vital farms and ranchlands, protecting tens of thousands of agricultural acres, enhancing our state's natural resource values and reducing our state's greenhouse gas emissions. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Natasha Bellis
Conservation Director