

January 21, 2025

House Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water Committee  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support for the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHF), HB 3131 in 2025-2027

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

**The undersigned organizations respectfully request your support of HB 3131, a bill supporting the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHF) with an appropriation of \$17.3 million for the 2025-2027 biennium.** OAHF is a grant program at the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, and it was created in 2017 by a bipartisan group of legislators in partnership with agricultural and conservation organizations to protect agricultural lands and keep them in production, support Oregon's farmers and ranchers, conserve natural resources on working lands, and leverage consistent federal investments. OAHF includes four grant programs: working land conservation easements, conservation management plans, support for intergenerational farm transfer, and technical assistance.

The program has been funded twice before, in 2022 and 2024. The \$5 million state appropriation in the 2022 legislative session leveraged \$6.7 million in matching federal funds from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and permanently protected 12,480 acres of working lands across Oregon. **We now have the opportunity to do even more.** The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) added \$1.4 billion in Agricultural Conservation Easement Program funding (ACEP), which matches OAHF's conservation easements at a 50%-75% match.

Consistently funded state programs attract long-term federal investments. Across the country, 27 other states operate state matching programs for working lands conservation and are more competitive for IRA dollars. In a recent survey of Oregon farmers, we found there are at least 25 potential working lands conservation projects in the pipeline for the 2025-2027 biennium – **for \$17.3 million in state funds, these projects would protect 38,000 acres of land and leverage \$32.5M in federal funds (a 2:1 federal match!).** The \$17.3 million request includes the needed state match dollars for each of these conservation easement projects, plus funding for an FTE at OWEB to administer all OAHF grant programs.

The Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHF) has broad and bipartisan support, helps Oregon leverage federal dollars, conserves natural resources on working lands, and keeps farm

and ranch land in production while supporting rural economies. We thank you for your prior support for this program and urge you to support HB 3131.

Thank you.

