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On Behalf Of: Groundswell Farm
Committee: House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2979

Since 1998 our farm has been the only year-round, commercial produce operation in our remote corner of the state, dedicated to providing fresh produce to local and low income families, foodbanks, and grocery stores on Oregon's Southcoast. In August of 2023, for the first time ever, our irrigation rights were regulated off by Oregon Water Resources Department – fully and unexpectedly during the peak of our growing season. For a fresh-market vegetable farm like ours, which relies on weekly irrigation to keep crops alive through the heat of summer, it was devastating.

The Department took regulatory action in our watershed due to inadequate instream flows, which they attributed to climate change. Unfortunately it's becoming clear that this terrible experience is no longer unique or anomalous among Oregon farmers: water shortages and subsequent regulation are becoming increasingly common in watersheds around the state and are disproportionately impacting beginning, small, BIPOC, organic and diversified farmers, many of whom are dependent on vulnerable "junior" water rights.

We immediately recognized that If we are to have a future in farming, we needed to establish a backup irrigation source to supplement our existing water right. In the winter of 2024 we applied for and received a Disaster Resilience Grant, which enabled us to permit and build a large storage pond - a reservoir that can be filled during winter months when rainfall is abundant within our coastal watershed, then tapped in the late summer when our existing water right is at risk of being regulated off. A project of this scale would never have been possible without these grant funds, given the tight financial margins that we face as farmers. As of this month, we have a full storage pond holding over 1 million gallons of water, allowing us to sleep a little better a night as we anticipate the season to come. With the very survival of our farm at stake, the Disaster Resilience Grant Program helped save the day, buffering our farm against future water shortages so that we can continue to feed our rural community.

Farming has never been easy, but climate change is making it exponentially harder every year. These grant funds offer small, under-resourced farms like ours a critical opportunity to make strategic investments so we can adapt towards greater resiliency. We hope the Oregon legislature will recognize the urgent and ongoing need for these funds to support local and regional food systems, small family farms, and diversified, climate-forward agriculture in our state.

Thank you for funding the first round of Disaster Resilience Grants. Now let's do it again!