



Wednesday, February 26, 2025

Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Natural Resources

**RE: Support for HB 5029 and HB 3131 - Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program Funding and OWEB's Budget**

Co-Chairs Frederick and Levy, Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. For the record, my name is Nellie McAdams and I am the Executive Director of the Oregon Agricultural Trust or OAT. Our nonprofit helps farmers and ranchers around the state keep their land in agricultural production, protect its natural resources, and pass it on to future generations using working land conservation easements.

These easements are voluntary agreements between a landowner and an easement holder (such as OAT) to remove development rights that interfere with agricultural production. In exchange for protecting the land for agricultural and associated habitat, the landowner receives cash or tax deductions that they can use for succession, business investments, and more. The landowner retains ownership of the land, the land and business continue to contribute to the local economy, and the land is priced at agricultural value - making it more affordable to future generations.

OAT currently protects four properties covering over 30,000 acres, and we are working on another 60 projects to protect almost 200,000 acres from Clatsop County to Malheur County and in between. The properties we have protected have made it possible for first generation farmers and ranchers to afford agricultural land, and include riparian areas and Sage Grouse habitat. And easements provide critical investments in rural economies; Colorado has found that for every dollar of federal conservation easement investment in Colorado, \$2.19 of new economic activity is generated.

A critical need for these projects is funding for easements. We have matching grants from several federal programs to fund easement purchases, including \$4 million for use in Lane County and \$6 million for use in Harney County. But these grants require at least a 50 percent match. Some of that can come from landowner donation, but we also need a state matching grant to get these projects off of the ground.

Oregon's matching grant program (the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program) makes us one of 28 states that have easement match programs. Because of its investments in its easement



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program, Delaware has invested 10 times as much federal easement funding as Oregon. And currently the Governors of Tennessee and Wisconsin are requesting \$25 million and \$15 million for their state easement funding programs.

I urge you to support the minimum of \$2 million in OAHP grants proposed in POP 090 and ask that the Subcommittee consider additional grant funding adding up to \$17.3 million in total via HB 3131, which came to them unanimously from the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Water, and Natural Resources. In addition, to our ask that you support OAHP in HB 5039, we also ask that you support OWEB's budget generally, from POP 090 to 100, and 105 that help OWEB with efficiency.

Sincerely,

Nellie McAdams  
Executive Director  
Oregon Agricultural Trust