



Friends of Family Farmers ♦ PO Box 751 ♦ Junction City, OR 97448

503-581-7124 ♦ www.FriendsofFamilyFarmers.org

Co-Chairs Frederick and Levy, and members of the committee:

Friends of Family Farmers is a statewide nonprofit organization that serves 1,600 farmers and supports programs and policies that help small and midsize, highly diversified, local market farmers thrive. We are writing today in strong support of the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP) and the Natural and Working Lands Fund, included in POP 090 in the OWEB budget (HB 5039) and the additional funding for the program represented in HB 3131. We also support POP 100 and 105 in the OWEB Governor's Budget which provide crucial staffing resources to sustain the success of these and other programs. Oregon needs to take steps to keep farmland in production and provide pathways to land security for the next generation of farmers. The OAHP and Natural and Working Lands Fund play crucial roles in making this possible.

According to the 2022 USDA Census of Agriculture, there has been a nearly 29% increase in the price per acre of farmland in our state since 2017. This is three times the national average of 9.5%. Also, this number is a statewide average and some counties experienced much sharper price increases, including a 70% increase per acre in Benton County and an 80% increase per acre in Jefferson County. These trends of farmland price increases are driven in general by non-farm uses for our most precious agricultural soils. At these rates, the next generation of farmers cannot afford to keep up with climbing prices on farm income alone. Our biennial farmer survey and focus groups have identified access to affordable and appropriate farmland in the top three barriers for farm success for the last 5 bienniums, and we are poised to see this problem increase.

The OAHP provides a valuable service to our state by helping landowners apply conservation and working lands easements to their properties. These easements have manifold benefits; giving the current owners an influx of cash to take care of infrastructure and maintenance projects or enhance their current farm businesses without selling or developing any part of their property, and providing an opportunity for the next generation to purchase that land at the agricultural value when it changes hands down the road. This also allows farmers to tap into federal programs that support easements and long term conservation and stewardship plans through the provision of state matching funds. Do not leave this opportunity to bring federal investment to Oregon on the table and allow our farmers' eligible projects to go unfunded.

Climbing land prices have been a driving force in the land access crisis our farmers face. We help land seeking farmers year round through the Oregon Farm Link program and Navigate, our land seeker case management service. We have seen through our program participants that many farmers are losing hope that land ownership will ever be possible for them. This program has been around for more than a decade and land access has only gotten more tenuous for those seeking to work the land for a living. Easements can forever limit the activities on the land



Friends of Family Farmers ♦ PO Box 751 ♦ Junction City, OR 97448

503-581-7124 ♦ www.FriendsofFamilyFarmers.org

to agricultural production and allow future buyers to purchase the land at actual agricultural value. Loan products designed for farmers from FSA and USDA offer financing for the agricultural value of the land, not the inflated market price and easements are one of the only tools we have to bring those two in line and save farmers thousands in risky debt through other financing products.

OAHP should be the beginning of an investment in the protection of our agricultural lands, high value soils, and farmers' access to them. We need to continue to explore solutions that not only lower the cost of our farmlands for people entering the market, but also more ways to draw in federal investment and provide pathways for the farmers of the present and future to have secure access to quality agricultural land.

In addition to the benefits of making our farmland more affordable and keeping it in production, the technical assistance provided through OAHP can help our producers adapt to climate change. Farmers and ranchers are on the front lines of worsening natural disasters and are losing the ability to accurately predict seasonal fluctuations and patterns. The Climate Action Commission has repeatedly recommended funding for OAHP as an important part of Natural and Working Land climate mitigation. This needs to be the beginning of a bigger conversation on how we can maintain Oregon's agricultural industry and community into the future, and OAHP is a great place to start.

Please support the \$2M in OAHP grants and the \$5M of Natural and Working Lands grant supports proposed in POP 090 of the OWEB budget (HB 5039), the staffing resources in POPs 100 and 105 crucial to these important programs and we ask that the Subcommittee consider additional grant funding via HB 3131, which came to them unanimously from the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Water, and Natural Resources.

Sincerely,

Alice Morrison
Co-Executive Director
Friends of Family Farmers