

February 27, 2025

To: Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

From: Christy Anderson Brekken, J.D., Ph.D.

RE: H.B. 5039, Support for the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program and OWEB 2025-2027 Budget

Co-Chair Frederick, Co-Chair Levy, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing in support of the inclusion of \$17.3 million funding for the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP) as part of the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board's (OWEB) 2025-2027 budget in the 2025 Oregon Legislative Session. OAHP helps Oregon leverage a 2:1 federal match through programs including the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and protects working ranch and farmlands for their agriculture and natural resource values.

We have a farm succession planning crisis in Oregon, where the average age of farmers increases each year while fewer enter the field. Keeping Oregon agriculture and natural resources vibrant and strong requires Oregonians who will steward the land while providing us with food and fiber. OAHP funds working lands easements in Oregon, keeping the land in agricultural production while preserving waterways and habitat. Farmers are able to realize some of the equity in their land, so that a next-generation farmer can take it over with fewer hurdles, and protecting the land from development or investment firms.

Farmers are facing many threats to their survival right now, from economic issues to the impacts of climate change. OAHP is also supported by the Climate Action Commission, which has repeatedly recommended funding for OAHP as an important part of Natural and Working Land climate mitigation. Farmers can get technical assistance in adapting to climate change and adopting climate-friendly policies.

OAHP has the support of the agricultural sector and bipartisan support in the legislature—please vote to support including \$17.3 million funding for the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program as part of the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board's 2025-2027 budget.

Thank you,

Christy Anderson Brekken

Corvallis, Oregon