



Eugene School District 4J
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Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Education
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Wednesday, March 12, 2025

Co-Chairs Senator Sollman and Representative Ruiz and members of the Committee,

I am writing to testify in strong support of funding for the Farm to School Grant Program included in the Oregon Department of Education's budget at \$12 million. This represents a necessary 9% increase from the current service level, ensuring that Oregon's students continue to benefit from nutritious, locally sourced foods, hands-on farm and garden education, and essential technical assistance for farm-to-school initiatives. Given that requests for funding in the past biennium exceeded \$15 million, this increase is critical to maintaining current programming amid rising costs of food, supplies, and staffing.

As someone actively involved in school food programs, I have witnessed firsthand the impact of this grant program. The Farm to School Grant has allowed schools to incorporate fresh, locally grown produce into meal programs, improving student nutrition while directly supporting Oregon's agricultural economy. Moreover, the farm and garden education components of the program have empowered students with hands-on learning opportunities that foster an early appreciation for healthy eating, food systems, and sustainability.

Eugene School District 4J exemplifies the success of this program. The district has leveraged Farm to School funding to collaborate with local farms such as Riverbend Farms, Upriver Farms, and Camas Swale Farms, integrating fresh, locally sourced produce into school meals. In a particularly impactful partnership, Eugene 4J worked with a plum grower in Vida, Oregon, whose orchard survived the Holiday Farm Fire, purchasing his entire crop—supporting both the farmer and providing nutritious fruit for students. Additionally, the district has emphasized hands-on learning through programs like the Rachel Carson Environmental Science Program at Churchill High School, where students gain valuable experience in ecology and environmental science. Eugene 4J also participates in the "Love Food Not Waste" initiative, reducing food waste and promoting sustainability in partnership with the City of Eugene.

This program is essential for many reasons:

- It builds lifelong skills for wellness and health in children and communities.
- It strengthens Oregon's local food system and supports our local economy by keeping food dollars within the state.
- With the USDA eliminating over \$6 million in federal funding for Local Food for Schools, state support is more crucial than ever to sustain and expand farm-to-school efforts.

- Schools serve as critical food hubs, ensuring access to nutritious meals for students and families while strengthening community connections and resilience.

As we continue to recover from economic and public health challenges, now is the time to invest in programs that not only nourish our children but also stimulate local economies and build community resilience. I respectfully urge you to support the inclusion of \$12 million in funding for the Farm to School Grant Program in the Oregon Department of Education's budget.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jill Cuadros
Eugene School District 4J
Eugene, Oregon