

Submitter: Sarah Fowler
On Behalf Of: 12M for Farm To School
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee
On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB5515

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

I am testifying today in support of funding for the Farm to School Grant Program included in the Oregon Department of Education's budget at \$12 million dollars. This represents a 9% increase from the current service level. This Grant program provides funding for schools and early childhood education programs to purchase Oregon foods, hands-on farm and garden education programs and technical assistance for the farm to school community. This past biennium, there were over \$15 million dollars of requests for this funding. With increases in costs of food, supplies and staffing over the past few years, this modest increase is needed simply to maintain the current level of programming.

My family has directly benefited from farm to school programs because my son, now 14, has been the recipient of farm fresh school lunches, which he eats with gusto, during his tenure in public school system.

I support this farm to school grant program because I believe that fresh, local food is healthy for kids and tastes better than industrial food. Having access to fresh, local food in schools from a young age can be foundational in helping to establish health eating habits in children that will last them the rest of their lives, in turn, improving health outcomes across the lifespan. This relatively low cost intervention for children translates into much more hefty savings in spending on health care down the road for individuals whose lifelong eating habits are impacted for the better. I have participated in the local food movement since I was 18 years old, first as worker on small, organic farms, then as a mentor and volunteer for Ashland's Rogue Valley Farm to School program, and current, as a supporter of farm to school efforts.

Furthermore, I support the grant program because, farm to school programs build a strong local food system and supports our local economy - I know many small farmers in our area are struggling due to not receiving funds from other federal programs related to climate change, for which they have already done the labor as promised. Additionally, over \$6M in Federal funding for Local Food for Schools has been eliminated by the USDA, now more than ever we need to increase state funding for farm to school. Lastly, in this era where forest fires (especially in Southern Oregon, where we live) and pandemics, schools serve as hubs for communities especially during times of crisis such as wildfires and pandemic

I ask that you support including this grant program in the Oregon Department of Education's budget at \$12 million. Thank you for your time.

Sarah Fowler
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