

Submitter: Amber Roth
On Behalf Of: Farm to School
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee
On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB5515

Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Education
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

March 19th, 2025

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.

The school I work with is a Title 1 elementary school in Portland Oregon and has benefited from this grant program through farm to school nutrition in the cafeteria and classroom learning, farm field trips to learn about food systems and farmers, and in-class and after school programming around healthy foods, growing food, seasonal eating, and food systems.

I support this grant program because it provides for increased wellness and health in kids and communities in a direct manner. I have seen first hand how learning about food systems and providing practical tools for learning to grow food has transformed the wellness and health of students in the community and school I serve. Students are more willing to try new foods, understand the reason to eat healthier, I have seen wellness increase and attendance increase, and have also witnessed students impacting their family's wellness at home as they share this information with their families. Families are also able to understand and access healthier options when this knowledge is presented and offered. I have also seen how engagement in the school garden classroom positively affects socio-emotional health and well-being, student emotional regulation, empathy and understanding of other cultures and the care for the world around them.

These grants help build a strong local food system that supports our local economy. We have been able to support local producers and increase affordable and local food access.

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. These grants also enable support for schools as hubs for communities, especially during times of crisis such as wildfires and pandemic. Schools are centers for connecting to diverse communities and vulnerable community members, and these efforts strengthen communities where help is needed most!

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.

Amber Roth
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