

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

March 18, 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.

As a Regional Hub Lead for School Garden Education for Central Oregon, I am able to provide technical assistance to our regional school garden educators through the technical assistance provided by these funds. Getting educators together to tour other gardens, share resources and ideas, further strengthens educators ability and resolve to continue championing their own school garden efforts. School gardens provide direct access for students to try new foods which directly impact their proclivity to try new foods throughout their life, leading to healthy outcomes, among the many other researched academic and social benefits from school gardens for our students.

As a mother to a middle schooler, I also personally support the farm to school funds to procure Oregon products. Since she chooses school lunch every day (and has for years), I feel good knowing when she eats bread, it's fresh baked using Oregon grown and milled whole grain flour. When she eats beef, it's Oregon raised, and the fruit in the salad bar often comes from Oregon farms and orchards. I love knowing that her school lunch is also supporting Oregon farmers and ranchers. 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.

Denise Rowcroft, Youth Education Program Director
The Environmental Center
Bend, OR

