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**Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Education**

Oregon State Capitol  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, Oregon 97301

Subject: Testimony in Support of the Farm to School Grant Program in the ODE Budget Bill (SB 5515)

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

I am testifying today in strong support of funding for the Farm to School Grant Program included in the Oregon Department of Education's budget at \$12 million.

Phoenix Charter School of Roseburg is a small, rural Charter High School in Douglas County that has directly benefited from this program. We have successfully implemented a Farm to School Education program that teaches students about sustainable farming, fresh food harvesting, preparation, and ecological stewardship. The program connects students with their local food systems while building lifelong skills.

With support from the Farm to School Grant, we have been able to integrate workforce development through blended funding sources, including the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Oregon Youth Corps (OYC) dollars from the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC). This allows us to employ students on our farm, giving them hands-on experience while earning wages, credits, and valuable career skills.

Our students come from underserved backgrounds, and this program has provided them with opportunities to succeed academically and professionally. Over the past decade, our farm education system has positively impacted hundreds of students. The fresh produce grown on our farm is incorporated into our school lunch program and contributes to crop sales that help sustain our charter school's programming.

With over \$15 million in funding requests in the past biennium and the elimination of \$6 million in federal funding for local food programs, it is more important than ever to increase state support. The modest increase to \$12 million is critical to maintaining these vital programs, which not only benefit students but also strengthen local food systems and support Oregon's agricultural economy.

I urge you to support this grant program in the Oregon Department of Education's budget. Thank you for your time and commitment to investing in Oregon's youth and local food systems.

Sincerely,

*Joy Whitcomb*

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