

Submitter: Del Blanchard

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Natural Resources

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB5502

3/24/2025

Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Natural Resources
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Co-Chairs Senator Frederick and Representative Levy, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to share my strong support for maintaining and strengthening the Farm to School Equipment and Infrastructure Grant Program within the Oregon Department of Agriculture's budget. My name is Del Blanchard, and I operate a farm where I grow wheat and mill it into flour for institutional and retail sales. While I have not personally received a grant through this program, I have seen how critical it can be for other farmers looking to supply local schools and early care centers.

This grant funding is vital because it helps producers acquire the tools and infrastructure needed to meet the unique demands of school food service. By covering expenses like refrigeration, storage, or specialized packaging equipment, the program effectively removes barriers that would otherwise prevent smaller and mid-sized farms from selling their products to schools. As someone who values sustainable, local food systems, I believe every farmer who wants to supply Oregon's schools should have a fair chance to do so.

With federal funding for similar initiatives under threat, it is more urgent than ever for Oregon to invest in this program. Schools rely on consistent, high-quality food options that meet specific safety and delivery standards, and local producers are eager to fulfill this need. However, without adequate support, it is often difficult for farmers—especially those just starting out or looking to expand into the school marketplace—to make the upgrades necessary for success.

I respectfully ask the Committee to continue and increase the funding for the Farm to School Equipment and Infrastructure Grant Program in the Oregon Department of Agriculture's budget to at least \$1 million. Your support will help ensure that local producers have the resources needed to grow, process, and deliver nutritious foods

to our students and children in early care centers.

Thank you for considering my testimony and for your dedication to strengthening Oregon's local food system.

Sincerely,

Del Blanchard
Myrtle Creek Farm LLC
Myrtle Creek, Oregon