



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

March 24, 2025

Co-Chairs Ruiz & Sollman and members of the Committee, my name is Melina Barker and I am the Director of the Oregon Farm to School Network. The Network has 1,900 community members that are primarily food producers, child nutrition professionals, and educators.

Farm to School is a national movement and Oregon has one of the longest standing programs in the nation. Oregon's Farm to School Grant Program is a comprehensive suite of funding opportunities that supports the purchase of Oregon foods for schools and early childcare education centers; funds hands-on farm and garden educational programs; and funds technical assistance and training for the farm to school community.

Over the last 10 years the Farm to School Grant Program has allowed our state to:

- Increase the number of school gardens from 170 to 780 –now including at least 1 in every county.
- Grow from a few highly motivated school districts serving Oregon foods on the lunchline to a point where it's the norm in over 208 school districts and early childhood education centers to offer Oregon food before, during and after school as well as in the summer.
- Grow from 40 to 356 food producers selling to schools and early childhood education centers.

I am testifying today in support of expanding current funding for the Farm to School Grant Program to \$12 million dollars included in the Oregon Department of Education's budget. Unfortunately we have recently learned of many federal funding cuts to crucial farm to school grants such as the Local Food for Schools program which would have brought \$6 million in federal funding to Oregon as well as countless USDA grant programs that support agriculture education and regional food systems. In light of the elimination of these federal programs, we need our state program more than ever.

At the Oregon Farm to School Network we hear every day about the impacts that farm to school programs are having for local food producers and students in our schools. Sometimes it's a story

about how meaningful it is to serve local food and watch students make connections about the community and local agriculture. Sometimes it's a story of the significance of the school marketplace in the business development of a small farm or ranch.

Farm to School programs build healthy life skills, connect schools and communities and support social-emotional learning through connection to place, nature and nourishment. Now is the time to ensure that we provide sustained and reliable funding for these programs so students, food producers and schools can continue to build dependable relationships and deepen partnerships. In addition, we support full funding for School Meals for All so that no student is hungry at school and all students benefit from local, nourishing food. I ask that you support including the Farm to School grant program in the Oregon Department of Education's budget at \$12 million, and fully fund School Meals for All.

Sincerely,
Melina Barker

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Melina Barker". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name.

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