



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

**3/25/25**

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

My name is Aaron Poplack, and I am the Oregon Impact and Partnership Lead at FoodCorps. I am also a lifelong Oregon resident, and a former Portland Public Schools student. [FoodCorps](https://www.foodcorps.org) is a national non-profit with a vision for every child to experience the joy and power of food in school. For 13 years we have partnered with Oregon communities to place emerging leaders in schools to teach food and nutrition education, support school gardens, and introduce and expose children to nutritious foods in the cafeteria setting by encouraging them to try new things. Annually, we have 7 FoodCorps AmeriCorps service members who support access to food education and nourishing school meals in over 33 high need schools across 6 school districts in Oregon.

FoodCorps is submitting testimony today **in support of funding for the Farm to School Grant Program being included in the Oregon Department of Education's budget at \$12 million dollars.**

This \$12 million ask represents a 9% increase from the current service level. 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.

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. In 2019, when the legislature passed the initial expansion of the program, we doubled the number of eligible entities to include Summer Meals and Early Childhood Education sites, and the bill was passed at \$15 million in funding. COVID era cuts brought that down to \$10.1 million, and so we've never actually seen that full amount allocated. The demand was clear in 2019, and it is clear today. **This past biennium, there were over \$15 million dollars in requests for this funding.** This year, ODE has already allocated the full biennium's local purchasing funds, with almost half of the school year remaining.

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In addition to existing demand, \$6M in Federal funding for Local Food for Schools was eliminated by the USDA this month. That's \$6 million additional federal dollars that would have gone to Oregon farmers, lost. Now is the moment to invest in feeding Oregon kids, while supporting Oregon farmers, ranchers, and producers.

Food is also a powerful tool for connection to community when it is accessible, nourishing, and affirming. Districts across the state are reimagining the school food experience with the support of Oregon's Farm to School funding. In Umatilla, our FoodCorps members collaborated with students to design a pozole recipe for their school menu, and students regularly have the chance to eat tamales that are locally sourced from [Salsas Locas](#). This past December, I spent the afternoon with students in David Douglas cafeterias who ate purple potatoes that were served on the lunch line, while chatting with the farmer who grew them in Boring, OR.

**FoodCorps is proud to be part of a broad coalition of over 62 school districts and organizations who support including this grant program in the Oregon Department of Education's budget at \$12 million** so this program can continue to support healthy kids, schools and communities.

Sincerely,

**Aaron Poplack**

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