

Submitter: Erin Maher
On Behalf Of: Farm to School
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5006

I am writing in support of funding for the Farm to School Grant Program included in the Oregon Department of Education and Oregon Department of Agriculture budgets. Oregon's Farm to School Programs help schools and early childhood education programs purchase Oregon-grown foods, support hands-on farm and garden education, and provide essential equipment for food producers. These programs play a vital role in building strong local food systems and improving student health.

These programs work in tandem with School Meals for All (HB 3435) to expand free breakfast and lunch to every public school. The virtuous cycle of increased meal service through free meal programs allows districts to source even more fresh, local ingredients for school meals.

As an owner and operator of a local food business dedicated to expanding the reach of small and mid-sized local farms and supporting schools, institutions, businesses, and individuals to be able to shift their purchasing towards local foods, it's easy to see how important the Farm to School Grant Program is. School nutrition teams work extremely hard to feed students well on tight budgets and with small teams, and we hear time and again that they face challenges in sourcing locally that can be resolved with even small-scale infrastructure investments. At the same time, small farms face tight margins and usually do not have the capacity to expand their infrastructure without support. This grant fund can be transformative in the ability for farms and schools to work together to feed our kids and our community - all of which also supports local, often rural economies and increases resiliency in our local food systems.

This funding is especially critical as over \$6M in Federal funding for Local Food for Schools has been eliminated by the USDA, so now more than ever we need to increase state funding for farm to school.

We are asking the legislature to support:

\$12M for Farm to School in the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) budget
\$1M for Farm to School in the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) budget
Fully funding HB 3435, School Meals for All

With the elimination of federal funding sources and the rising costs of food, supplies, and staffing, a modest increase in funding is crucial for the sustainability of this important program.

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