

Submitter: Rebecca Slosberg
On Behalf Of:
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's budget at \$12 million dollars. This represents a 9% increase from the current service level. 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. This past biennium, there were over \$15 million dollars of requests for this funding. 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.

We support farm to school and have benefited from the grant funding. Rogue Valley Farm to School has been working to connect students with their local food for over 15 years. In this time we have seen a huge shift in the desire of our community to support this work. Schools want it, families want it and local producers want it. Farm to School programs are a huge win win and this funding is crucial to make it happen.

Rogue Valley Farm to School has cultivated these crucial relationships and built connections in our region. Students that had our programs in elementary school have learned life skills of cooking from scratch, growing food, knowing about our local food system and supporting agriculture in our region. These students are going out in the work force, making decisions about where to spend their money. The investment in these programs at the ECE and k-12 level will build stronger more resilient local economies and stronger communities.

The Rogue Valley has experienced crisis, the fires of 2020, pandemic and on-going water crisis and drought point to the need for farm to school education and strengthening our schools. This funding is critical at this point in time. With over \$6M in Federal funding for Local Food for Schools has been eliminated by the USDA, now more than ever we need to increase state funding for farm to school. It is a vital time to strengthen our communities, invest in educational programs that teach our student's life skills, wellness and connections to Oregon agriculture.

We ask that you support including this grant program in the Oregon Department of Education's budget at \$12 million. Thank you for your time.

Rebecca Slosberg
Co-Executive Director

Rogue Valley Farm to School