

April 21, 2025

TO: Joint Ways and Means Committee:

Sen. Kate Lieber, Co-Chair

Sen. Fred Girod, Co-Vice Chair

Rep. Tawna Sanchez, Co-Chair

Rep. David Gomberg, Co-Vice Chair

Rep. Greg Smith, Co-Vice Chair

Sen. Dick Anderson

Sen. Daniel Bonham

Sen. Anthony Broadman

Sen. Wlnsvey Campos

Sen. Lew Frederick

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Sen. Janeen Sollman

Sen. Aaron Woods

Rep. Ben Bowman

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Rep. Jami Cate

Rep. Christine Drazan

Rep. Paul Evans

Rep. Emerson Levy

Rep. Mark Owens

Rep. Ricki Ruiz

Rep. Andrea Valderrama

Testimonial in **SUPPORT of HB 2408**: OSU Statewides

Please **Support HB 2408 and fully-fund OSU Statewide Public Service Programs** which includes OSU Extension Service, Agricultural Experimental Station, branch stations and Forestry Research Lab.

There is a need to be cautious about increasing the State Budget due to uncertainties in Oregon's funding sources. However, at a time when the public requires valuable information and resources to manage economic uncertainty and food insecurities, it is important to consider funding public service programs. Supporting **HB 2408** would provide full funding for OSU Statewide Public Service Programs, including OSU Extension Service, Agricultural Experimental Station, branch stations, and Forestry Research Lab.

It is important to ensure that public service programs receive adequate funding. Given the current economic uncertainty, employment issues, and the flow of goods and produce into the US, the public requires reliable information and resources to manage the challenges in the coming months.

The OSU Extension Service offers more than just gardening assistance through the over 2,300 certified and trained volunteers in Master Gardener™ Program. It provides essential programs and services that help the public understand sustainability by offering resources and knowledge from trained volunteers in various specialties. Here on the Coast in Newport, OSU Extension includes Sea Grant programs that supply vital information about fisheries supporting coastal families and communities. Most Extension Offices have 4-H Programs that equip youth with modern farming techniques and necessary knowledge for surrounding communities and businesses.

While online searches can provide gardening techniques, AI and the Internet lack tangible knowledge specific to local growing conditions. It also does not offer expertise in handling pest problems without relying on harmful chemicals. Not only is there one-on-one personal engagement and interaction, but our community members come to rely on research-based, scientifically proven information from knowledgeable, hands-on experienced Master Gardener volunteers which is shown in the over 38,000 questions answered by certified Master Gardener volunteers in 2024 at plant help desks, farmers markets, emails and calls. In 2024, the statewide impact of OSU Extension certified Master Gardner

volunteers' is reflected in the over 157,213 volunteer hours (equivalent to 77 Full-Time Employees) and over 167,950 Public Contacts, the over 40 tons of produce donated to food shares and food pantries.

As a trained, certified Master Gardener™ volunteer in Lincoln County, I have witnessed the significant impact OSU Extension has made on our community. In 2023, Master Gardeners partnered with Newport Public Library to establish and maintain Lincoln County's inaugural seed library.

In 2024, the Grow with Us Seed Library provided over 2,500 free seed packets to Lincoln County Residents. This April, Lincoln County Master Gardeners Association is hosting a free Spring into Sustainability Conference to provide the public with valuable information and resources on gardening topics ranging from water catchment, pollinator-friendly gardening, native species and eradicating invasive weeds.

Growing backyard gardens becomes crucial during times of food insecurity. Historical periods like World War II and more recent events such as COVID-19 have seen people aiming to become more self-reliant and resilient by creating gardening spaces at home, including community gardens.

Our communities require support, services, programs, and resources now more than ever. Reductions in funding for OSU Statewide Public Service Programs should be avoided. At this time when the public needs reliable information and resources to navigate economic uncertainties, it is critical to **fully fund the OSU Statewide Public Service Programs within HB 2408** to meet all of Oregon's diverse community needs.

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