

## 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.

I understand the 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.

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 in the Columbia Gorge area, our Master Gardener™ Program engages our community in a variety of ways that serve tax payers, thus making funding for these services a *public* service and well worth the money.

In 2024, for example, our chapter began several new projects related to community outreach aimed especially at lower-income and vulnerable populations. A group of Master Gardeners collaborated with Extension Office and Housing Authority employees, for instance, to work with families at a local apartment complex to establish community vegetable beds there. Master Gardeners worked with residents not only to help with planting, but also to teach about gardening so that the residents might be able to serve their families and community. The FISH Food Bank garden provides families with fresh produce for the local food bank, which would otherwise only be able to offer pantry staples, those food stuffs that store well but that aren't always of the highest nutritional value. By providing fresh produce, the FISH Food Bank garden helps to sustain community health and well being beyond the typical food bank.

The Columbia Gorge Master Gardener Association also hosted a new Garden Tour in the Hood River Heights, which included over 100 visitors. Continued work by the Educational Writing Crew, which writes articles for publication in the Columbia Gorge News Home & Garden section, expanded the chapter's educational mission to the community at large, including those who cannot attend events in person. And the Garden Gathering Series brought this educational mission directly to community members in the form of hands-on monthly workshops about timely garden topics. In all, chapter members spent more than 4200 volunteer hours, made over 2500 contacts with the community, and grew nearly 1300 lbs of produce for the FISH Food Bank Garden. 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.