

Dear Oregon Legislature, House Committee of Agriculture and Natural Resources,

I am writing to ask you to **support the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP)**, to help Oregon farmers and ranchers plan for succession and preserve their land for future generations. OAHP (HB 3249) fulfills a long-identified need for a state program to keep agricultural land in production, help agricultural landowners conserve their lands and pass them on to the next generation, and protect and enhance fish and wildlife habitat on working lands.

I acknowledge that funding is tight this budget year. While I hope the Legislature can do something to generate more revenue in future years for important programs, this year I ask that you at least establish the basis for the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program, even with minimal funding.

I contributed to a report published in fall 2016, [The Future of Oregon's Agricultural Land](#), which raised some important points that provide support for the OAHP:

1. Oregon farmers are older on average than at any other time in history. They've farmed longer, have larger farms, and hold on to farmland longer. The average age of an Oregon farmer was 60 in 2012, compared to 55 in 2002 and 50 years in 1982. Farm operators aged 55 and older control 64 percent of agricultural land, or 10.45 million acres, which could change hands in the next 20 years.

2. Almost two-thirds of Oregon's farmland may be transferred over the next 20 years- and many farmers do not have succession plans. About 84 percent of Oregon farms are sole proprietorships, suggesting that the vast majority of Oregon farmers likely have not created thorough plans to smoothly transfer their businesses and assets to the next generation. If Oregon farmers do not have succession plans, their land is more vulnerable to sale for non-farm uses, fragmentation, or eventual development.

3. Oregon's agricultural land base faces many threats, even with our strong land use planning and EFU zoning. Zoning is impermanent, and every year, EFU zoned farmland is changed to another zoning category. Meanwhile, the amount of land in mixed forest/agriculture and intensive agriculture in the state each declined about 100,000 acres from 1974-2014, with most of the loss in the Willamette Valley and in

Central Oregon. Most of that land was converted to low-density residential land use. Even with our EFU zones, the amount of non-farm uses throughout the state has been increasing steadily over the past few decades, raising concerns about the negative cumulative impacts to farming.

Please consider **supporting the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP/HB 3249)**.

Respectfully,

Megan Horst, PhD

Assistant Professor, Nohad A. Toulon School of Urban Studies & Planning- USP

Co-Director, [Graduate Certificate in Sustainable Food Systems](#)

mhorst@pdx.edu | 503.725.5946 | [Meet Professor Horst](#)

In-Person Location: Urban Center 320D

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 751, Portland State University, Portland OR 97207