



Wallowa Land Trust

Representative Brian Clem, Chair
House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
900 Court Street NE, Room 347
Salem, Oregon 97301

March 28, 2017

RE: Support for House Bill 3249

Dear Chair Clem and Committee Members,

I'm writing to testify in support of HB 3249, known as the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program. Wallowa Land Trust is a nonprofit land conservation organization based in Enterprise, Oregon. We use voluntary, non-regulatory tools to permanently protect natural areas, wildlife habitat and working lands. A large focus of our work is helping private landowners in Wallowa County keep their farms and ranches economically viable while protecting important conservation values on their land. Some of the richest, most productive farmground in the county also contains the best habitat for native plants, fish and wildlife. Together with landowners, we are finding ways to protect these lands for present and future generations. One of the biggest limiting factors allowing us to be successful is the lack of a state program supporting farm and rangeland protection. Unlike our neighbors in Washington and California, Oregon has no program to protect the working lands that define our rural heritage. The Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP) would change that.

Oregon continues to face pressure on its rural land from low-density development, fragmentation, population growth, succession challenges and other factors. Wallowa Land Trust sees this program as providing critical voluntary tools to help land trusts and landowners meet Oregon's natural resource goals.

This program would fulfill a much-needed funding niche by providing grants to land trusts and other eligible entities to protect agricultural land. Other states have farmland protection programs that leverage federal programs like the USDA Farm Bill's Agricultural Land Easement program. Oregon does not. The OAHP would fill that gap and allow our land trust to help farmers and ranchers in Wallowa County connect with these federal programs.

In addition, the OAHP would assist landowners with succession planning, fund a study to determine implications of Oregon's tax structure on succession planning, and provide support for managing conservation values on private land through management plans. Wallowa Land Trust fully supports these actions which would be of tremendous benefit to farmers and ranchers in Wallowa County.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB 3249.

Kathleen Ackley, Executive Director

Working cooperatively with local landowners to protect the rural nature of the Wallowa Country

PO Box 516 · Enterprise, Oregon · 97828
(541) 426-2042 · www.wallowalandtrust.org · info@wallowalandtrust.org