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April 14, 2017

Oregon Legislature  
Joint Ways and Means Education Subcommittee

Dear Committee members,

Columbia Gorge Fruit Growers represents 440 growers and 20 shippers of the tree fruit industry in Oregon's Mid-Columbia region, where more than 225,000 tons of pears, apples and cherries are produced annually. Maintaining a thriving fruit industry requires strong partners. We have found one with Oregon State University Statewide Public Service Programs, which provide state-of-the-art research and outreach in all 36 counties in Oregon, including Hood River and Wasco counties.

OSU Statewide Public Service Programs – which include Agricultural Experiment Stations, Extension Services and Forest Research Laboratories – and its scientists and extension agents provide the expertise to solve real-world problems, like pollinator health, access to high-quality nutritional food, and many other environmental quality and economic development issues facing Oregonians across the state.

Locally, Mid-Columbia Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Hood River has been a critical partner for more than 80 years. It provides a base of objective scientific information that addresses our fruit growers' needs. However, its research and administrative staff has been significantly reduced in the past year, suffering from significant turnover and funding issues.

Statewide, the foundation of OSU Statewide Public Service Programs was strengthened in 2015 when the Legislature approved a \$14 million increase. The resulting \$118 million funding level allowed OSU to hire 40 new research and extension positions across the state. OSU programs address significant challenges facing Oregon family farmers, low income families, and Oregon's natural resource enterprises. This monumental step reversed a 15-year decline when these vital programs were forced to eliminate positions and programs that served a diversity of Oregonians.

The Governor's recommended budget this biennium, however, would eliminate nearly 70 percent of the program increases. Most of these funds are used to cover personnel costs, and the only way to meet recommended budget goals is through the elimination of positions. This would decimate essential operations like Mid-Columbia Agricultural Research and Extension Center, where staffing already is below a sustainable level.

Restored funding is identified in SB 805, which is part of broader budget bill SB 5524. We want to support SB 805's goal to return \$5 million for OSU Agricultural Experiment Stations, \$3.6 million for OSU Extension Service and \$800,000 for Forest Research Laboratory.

SB 805 would enable OSU Statewide Public Service Programs to maintain the same level of service by providing a \$9.4 million increase in general fund resources. We urge you to support this increase in the funding for the OSU Statewide Public Service Programs.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Doke". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Mike Doke  
Executive Director  
Columbia Gorge Fruit Growers