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RE: HB 2038 Written Testimony to the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources

Chair Clem, Vice-chair McLain, Vice-chair Sprenger, Representative Barreto, Representative Esquivel, Representative McKeown, Representative Power, Representative Brock Smith, Representative Witt:

School Garden Project of Lane County has worked to bring school garden-based science education to elementary students for more than 15 years. It has been a labor of love, based on a passion for providing children with a hands-on educational experience that generates excellent academic outcomes, as well as an introduction to the outdoors, a sense of where their food comes from, real gardening skills, and a positive relationship with vegetables. A typical School Garden Project lesson introduces a science concept in the classroom, then reinforces that lesson with garden activities outside. Add to that an opportunity to eat the vegetables they've grown themselves, and we can point to both positive educational and health outcomes.

Our garden education programs are aligned with the Next Generation Science Standards and bring students into the garden during the school day, 8 to 10 times during the school year. The results are subtle, yet profound. From the second grader at Thurston Elementary who proclaimed one day, "You know what's awesome today? I love cabbage! I had no idea!" To the fifth grader at Two Rivers/Dos Ríos Elementary who did a great job reviewing the previous week's lesson on photosynthesis. When our instructor complimented him on his understanding of the topic, he looked at her solemnly and said, "No one has ever said that to me in school before." To the César Chávez Elementary fifth grader who announced to our garden educator, "I've learned so much in garden class that my parents are finally going to let me have a small garden at home!"

Teachers overwhelmingly report that one of the key nonacademic outcomes they see with their young students who participate in garden-based education is that they learn to collaborate and work together as a community.

In recent years, the legislature has seen the value of this educational work, as well as the broader importance of supporting our agricultural economy through supporting school purchases of Oregon grown and processed foods. This state funding is crucial to sustaining these educational programs, improving the quality school lunches, and supporting our local farmers. State funds are invested by school districts to purchase Oregon products, resulting in an economic multiplier effect within the state. In addition, educational partners who receive program support through the competitive grant process are able to leverage the state's investment to secure additional funding from private sources. For example, School Garden Project was awarded approximately \$19,500 for school garden education support during the current school year. While that is not sufficient to meet our educational needs, it helps us to leverage an additional \$175,000 in support of our local schools.

Especially during these challenging budget times, we respectfully ask that the Committee vote to support HB 2038 to continue these vital programs. Now more than ever, it is critical to invest in our children and our agricultural economy. Please continue to lead the way.

Thank you for your support and thoughtful consideration.