

Wheeler Derrick

From: Abi Rawles <abigail.jeanseau@gmail.com>
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To: HAGNR Exhibits
Subject: Garden Funding

Chair Clem and Members of the Committee,

My name is Abigail Jeanseau, and I'm a freshman at South Salem High. I have been in gardens for as long as I can remember. My mom had raised beds full of vegetables and trees of fruit in the summer, while in the spring their would often be colorful flowers arranged in the yard. At my charter elementary school in San Diego, we had a learning garden, and everyone knew how to eat a green bean, how to pick a tomato. For the longest time, I thought this was normal. I thought everyone could grow their own food, they only went to the grocery store for the matter of convenience. That's why when I ended up at Parrish Middle School on the first day of 6th grade, I was utterly surprised to learn how little the others knew. When we had our first Wednesday in the garden, everyone was very excited to get outside instead of being in the hot, stuffy classrooms, and yet they didn't know what to expect. When our garden coordinator showed my peers a butternut squash, I was amazed to find they didn't know it by sight. When asked where a tomato comes from, a few kids piped up with answers like "Safeway" or "Winco". Some of them only had a vague idea of where the seed started, if they fully knew what a seed was. From that first garden day on, I realized how important the need for agricultural training is to this next generation, and how I needed to help it.

As we progressed through days in the garden, scattered throughout middle school, we all learned more and more about the food we eat. I found three major things that happened to all of us when we were in the Parish garden. First, our class, no matter which subject had gone out, became more aware of each other, and we grew as a community. Although we all came from different backgrounds, there was something truly unifying about working outside together. We became less narcissistic, making sure others were feeling good, rather than focusing on our appearance or if we were popular. Out in the garden, we were all equals, and we were all community. The stereotypical popular kid could work beside the nerd who could work beside the fangirl. Our labels almost melted, and we became the 6th grade class, not the nerds over there and the jocks over here. When talking with my peers, I realized others felt the same way, we all loved the garden because we didn't have to worry so much about who was who. We were all connected with the Earth and we were all on the same level.

The second point I'd like to bring up is how learning gardens and the programs behind them teach us how to live a healthier life. I've noticed here more than any other state that Oregonians value a healthy, happy and wholesome lifestyle. We are the green state, the forest state, we love to be outside in nature. And yet, this next generation would rather be inside binging on Netflix or YouTube no matter if they live in the woods or next to a freeway. The truth is, most of my peers have forgotten the refreshing feeling of being outside, running around, building treehouses and crafting miniscule fairie houses. My mom remembers doing things like this as a kid, and yet there is a disconnect between her generation and mine. I'll admit, the first time my class went into a learning garden, there were a few bored faces. Actually everyone was a little bored. They were excited to do something other than conventional learning and yet most of them didn't want to be outside *working*. Luckily, when we started digging in the dirt and learning about important sustainable practices, composting and aquaponics, I saw people light up. They were really eager to learn about how to grow their own food, they just had to be given a chance. Throughout the year, kids were more and more open to trying the vegetables they had grown, partly because they were proud of them, and also because they understood why they were so good for you.

There's an old saying that I'm sure most of you have heard, "You can give a man a fish and feed him for a day, or you can teach the man to fish and feed him for a lifetime." I believe it's the same with gardening. Parrish Middle School is a title one school, to me that means we have a lot of kids in poverty, on food stamps, and eating two meals a day at school, knowing there might not be dinner on the table when they get home. That's a

scary reality to live in, but I think the learning gardens can help change that. If we can teach our kids to grow vegetables, we are not only giving them healthier food, but we are also giving them the means to live. When the garden would harvest veggies and give them away in the cafeteria, most of the students were very eager to try them. If we give students the opportunity to try healthy foods, they will be inspired to grow them themselves. When we plant seeds in the learning gardens, we are planting seeds in children's minds. These seeds tell them that they too can grow vegetables, they don't have to suffer any longer. They can go back to the age old ideal of living off the land. With gardens our children are happier, stronger, and brighter than ever.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I know Salem school's gardens have impacted many people. Of course, not everyone is going to become a farmer after being in a learning garden, but for many people, the very thought of growing vegetables has become more than an abstract concept. It's a new reality that they can pursue if they like, and now students have the means to be healthier. Most importantly, my class, along with others I'm sure, understands that vegetables come from a farm and *then* go to Safeway. For me personally, I have found a love for nutrition and gardening by participating in the learning garden. When I went to garden related events at our school, like the Urban Agfest, I found about even more programs, like the Youth Farm, which sparked an even bigger passion for me. Cutting funding for gardens hurts our school's mission to help children be strong, healthy *and* smart. If we take away school gardens, we take away the little sprinkling of joy in an otherwise difficult day for kinesthetic learners. If we take away school gardens, we take away an opportunity for growing community. If we take away school gardens we take away the seeds of a healthy lifestyle.

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Abigail Jeanseau