



May 26, 2020

To the House Committee on Agriculture and Land Use:

Hello Representative Clem, members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to give testimony today. For the record my name is Amy Gilroy and I oversee the Farm to School Program at the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

Oregon Department of Agriculture's Farm to School Program

My role is to advise the Oregon Department of Education on how the Farm to School Grant Programs are implemented in the State and to help producers, processors, ranchers and other Oregon farm and food businesses sell eligible products into the school marketplace. I provide one-on-one assistance to producers and food businesses to help them navigate school food procurement regulations and provide them with the technical information they need to produce or manufacture products that meet school meal nutrition standards.

I also oversee the new Farm to School Producer Equipment and Infrastructure Grant Program that was recently appropriated with the passage of House Bill 2579 for the 2019-2021 biennium.

Some important points about the Farm to School Program include:

- About 300 producers, processors, ranchers and fishermen sell into the school marketplace under the program (according to reimbursement claims processed by the Oregon Department of Education).
- The volume and variety of Oregon produce is typically limited from January through May. Few varieties of Oregon produce are sold to schools during this time, with the exception of a few winter and storage crops.
- Schools often prefer some minimal processing which reduces the labor cost of preparing cafeteria meals.

Impact of COVID 19 school closures on Producers in the Farm to School Program

- Many producers are currently facing school market disruptions. However, for some, schools have become a viable option where other food service markets have closed, such as restaurants.
- School reimbursement claims have declined since February.
- Given the dramatic shift from a full-service cafeteria meal program to Grab and Go meal sites, many fresh crop producers have found decreased demand from schools, and expect this to continue for the foreseeable future.
- In a recent agency survey, schools reported their Grab and Go food product options to be limited, and a high demand for minimally processed products.
- Schools also reported needing pre-packaged and portioned product ready for meal assembly. Some Oregon food manufacturers have been able to meet this demand. However, we hear that schools need more pre-cooked protein options in 4 ounce serving sizes and other pre-packaged meal assembly products than Oregon producers



and processors can currently provide. Individually packed entrees that are ready to heat and serve are convenient for schoolchildren at home.

- The bottom line is that the situation varies for producers from case to case. Many producers' sales to schools are reduced, while others have increased sales or begun to sell to schools as demand has changed due to COVID 19.

Status of the Farm to School Equipment and Infrastructure (F2S EI) Grant for Producers

- The purpose of the F2S EI Grant is to provide financial assistance to producers and processors for the purchase of equipment and/or installation of infrastructure necessary to overcome barriers to enter the school marketplace.
- ODA received 35 qualified applications and a review committee has completed its evaluation.
- ODA received a total of \$2.1 million in requested funds.
- There is demand for these funds, especially given the changes to school market procurement since COVID 19, should additional funding become available for F2S EI.
- F2S EI grants are critical to help producers and processors with necessary infrastructure upgrades to make products in this new market a reality.

We anticipate schools will continue to provide meals but not in the way they were before, and it is uncertain when their full- service cafeteria meal programs will resume. We expect this will increase the demand for more processed Oregon products that are readily available and convenient to assemble. ODA is committed to adapting our resources to help producers and processors develop appropriate supply for schools.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today and I'd be happy to answer any questions the committee might have.

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