

House Committee on Agriculture and Land Use
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301



Date: 12/16/2020

Greetings Chair Clem and Members of the Committee:

My name is **Cathy Boden** and I am the Youth Education Specialist with the Youth Education Program for the Curry Watersheds Partnership.

I live in the small, rural community of Port Orford, Oregon, we are so rural some refer to us as “frontier”. As a Farm to School educator in this rugged and isolated region of the Southern Oregon Coast I witness firsthand the challenges our families face every day.

While helping 4th grade students cook cornbread in a Dutch Oven, as a part of their Oregon Trail education, we were all huddled together (pre-covid), warming our hands near the coals, and telling stories. One young girl mentioned that this was how their family cooked while they were homeless. This is not an isolated story. Many of our youth live in substandard housing, and have a limited amount of food to eat. Food in most rural areas is expensive.

Many things can make for challenging economic circumstances on the Southern Oregon Coast, as with many small communities. A crab season that doesn’t open on time because of storms, or pricing agreements, or crab readiness. A tourism season that is limited to only four months of the year. And severe weather makes the roads we travel to work unsafe or literally washed away.

And now 2020, a challenge for everyone. However, this pandemic has disproportionately affected Oregon’s small rural communities. In good times, our communities struggle with poverty. With this culture of poverty comes hardships that weigh heavily on our families, especially children. Many kids get their food entirely from the school breakfast and lunch programs. With Covid, and the unemployment it has generated, our small-town food banks have vehicle lines that twist through our neighborhoods for several blocks.

Our Youth Education Program was fortunate to be allowed access to the school garden during closures. Thanks to a F2S Education Grant that led to a winter planting by 2nd graders, spring provided a school garden full of produce. This food became a life line for many school families. With the absence of kids at school, we transitioned the garden from education to production/demonstration to increase the capacity of food grown for families. Showcasing one of the many reasons school gardens are so important.

So, we were shocked to learn that Farm to School Procurement Grant funds were completely taken away, only half way through the funding period, as a result of the mid-biennium grant reductions by the legislature. Our award is less than \$3,000. The loss of these funds meant our district wasn’t able to buy

from local producers. This is a time when rural schools and our local farmers need funds. Our cafeteria managers were suddenly tasked with creating a new lunch system and delivery to a spread-out rural school district. One principal jumped on a bus route to greet students as lunches were delivered, witnessing the living conditions of some students brought tears. This is our story, but I'm sure a similar story is wide spread across our state.

Not only is our cafeteria challenged by this funding loss, but also our F2S Education program. We tie program education to procured foods so students learn where this Oregon grown food comes from, the role agriculture plays in our community, meet the farmer, and offer taste testings so kids can learn to try new foods together.

Grant funding is one way we can bring dollars, and resources to our rural communities. Rural schools across the state depend on these funds to enrich and add value to the education our small schools offer. These programs support local farmers and connect kids and families with Oregon Grown foods.

As a Farm to School Education Hub Lead for Coos & Curry County, my role is to involve more schools and teachers in this valuable education that focuses on Oregon Agriculture, and connects students and families with the food they put in their bodies, and teaches the value of nutrition. The school districts need dependable funds.

We have an amazing opportunity to not only provide quality local food to the commodity foods schools are given, but to also support small family farms and help our farmers share Oregon's Agricultural Story.

Thank you for your time.

Cathy Boden
Youth Education Specialist
Farm to School Education Hub Lead for Coos & Curry County
Curry Watersheds Partnership / Youth Education Program
Curry County, Oregon