

January 23, 2019

Oregon House Committee on Agriculture and Land Use
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE, Room 347,
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Rep. Brian Clem (Chair), Rep. Susan McLain & Rep. Bill Post (Vice-Chairs) & members of the Committee,

I write on behalf of The Nature Conservancy to express support for the Oregon Agriculture Heritage Program (OAHP).

The Nature Conservancy is a global, science-based, non-partisan conservation organization. Our mission is to protect the lands and waters on which all life depends. The Nature Conservancy was incorporated in Oregon in 1961. Today we have over 50,000 supporters statewide with members in every county in Oregon. Our staff, based in communities across Oregon, work collaboratively with tribes; local, state and federal agencies and elected officials; private landowners; businesses; and natural resource stakeholders to develop innovative solutions to major challenges facing people and nature.

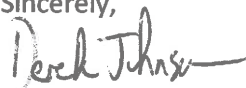
In 2017, The Nature Conservancy supported HB 3249 which created the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program, the state's first voluntary farm and natural resource conservation program to support Oregon's "working lands" particularly in our state's rural communities. These privately owned or managed working lands create agricultural production valued at \$5.4 billion—the state's second-largest economic driver. At the same time, well managed agricultural lands support valuable fish and wildlife habitat as well as enhancing other natural resources. While the program was established in 2017, it cannot fulfill its robust aspirations without adequate funding.

In 2019, we urge the Oregon Legislature to consider funding this important program by passing HB 2729. This bill has bipartisan support and is championed by Senator Hansell and Representatives Witt and Helm. With appropriate funding, OAHP can begin fulfilling its promise of addressing:

- A historic opportunity – Two-thirds (10.45M acres) of Oregon's agricultural lands will change hands in the next 20 years, yet up to 80% of Oregon farmers and ranchers may not have a succession plan.
- Agriculture at risk – In this transition, productive land and associated habitat are vulnerable to sale for non-farm uses, fragmentation into unviable parcel sizes, and eventual development.
- The capture of lost federal dollars – A federal program exists to permanently protect US agricultural land – NRCS's Agricultural Land Easement program (ACEP-ALE). Yet each year, Oregon leaves millions of federal dollars on the table because we do not have a state grant program to match this funding.

We urge your favorable consideration of HB 2729 and support for the Oregon Agriculture Heritage Program.

Sincerely,



Derek Johnson
Director of Protection and Stewardship