

February 11, 2019

Oregon House Committee on Agriculture and Land Use

Regarding HB 2729 which appropriates moneys from General Fund to Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board for purposes related to programs for grants from Oregon Agricultural Heritage Fund.

Submitted by: Derek Johnson, Director of Protection and Stewardship

On behalf of The Nature Conservancy, I submit this testimony to renew our support for the Oregon Agriculture Heritage Program (OAHP).

The Nature Conservancy is a global, science-based, non-partisan conservation organization. Our mission is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. The Nature Conservancy was incorporated in Oregon in 1961. Today we have over 70,000 supporters 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.

To reinforce the points asserted in our letter to you dated January 23, 2019, The Nature Conservancy requests \$10 million in funding for OAHP by passing [HB 2729](#). I have had the privilege to serve on the [Oregon Agriculture Heritage Commission](#) alongside eleven other members appointed by the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board's (OWEB) Board, to guide and oversee OAHP implementation. Through my experience on the Work Group and Commission, I have gained firsthand knowledge of the care and diligence that has gone into shaping OAHP, the state's first voluntary farm and natural resource conservation program to support Oregon's "working lands" particularly in our state's rural communities.

Thanks to OWEB, we know the need for such an investment far exceeds the \$10 million funding request currently under consideration before the Oregon Legislature. To this end, I urge the committee to recommend 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.

Privately owned or managed working lands create agricultural production valued at \$5.4 billion—the state’s second-largest economic driver. Well-managed agricultural lands support valuable fish and wildlife habitat as well as enhancing other natural resources. The Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program will be able to support Oregon’s “working lands” and fulfill its robust aspirations only if it is adequately funded.

I urge your favorable consideration of [HB 2729](#) and support for the Oregon Agriculture Heritage Program.

Respectfully submitted,

Derek Johnson
Director of Protection and Stewardship