

February 27, 2019

Chair Clem and Members of the Committee,

I am writing on behalf of myself and Ecotrust to ask you to support HB 2579, to expand funding for Oregon's Farm to School Grant Program. This program is transforming the health of our economies and our kids – bringing more jobs to communities and changing the way students are learning about, growing, and eating school food.

For over 25 years, Ecotrust's mission has been to inspire fresh thinking that creates economic opportunity, social equity, and environmental well-being. Oregon's Farm to School Grant Program exemplifies the economic, social, and environmental benefits that can be realized when we make the right investments and build capacity. For over a decade, our Food & Farms team has been partnering with schools to source and promote local foods to their students, staff, and families while simultaneously supporting producers to scale and serve schools and other institutions in long-term mutually beneficial partnerships. We do this work because we know it's critical to the success of Oregon's kids, food producers, and communities.

The state grant program gives school districts the financial boost they need to spend the money here at home. And they are! In the 2017/2018 school year, Oregon schools leveraged the \$1.6 million investment by the legislature and spent over \$14 million on Oregon food, creating direct and ripple-effect benefits for food producers, their distributors, and workers across the food chain.

Over 400 different Oregon farmers, ranchers, fisherman, processors, and food distributors have supplied Oregon schools since 2015. For every \$1 a school spends on local food, \$2 of economic activity is generated in our state's economy. Farm to school grant money is benefitting literally hundreds of businesses in our state. For every job that is created because a school district is buying local food, 2.6 total jobs are created across the state¹.

And we're not just growing Oregon's economy. We're improving the health of our children and our communities. In Oregon, over half of our school-aged kids qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. We have a lot of need right here, right now. The Farm to School Grant Program helps to meet those needs. The approximately 130 districts that have opted in to our state's Farm to School Grant Program together serve more than 90 percent of school-aged kids in Oregon. We're reaching the students in our communities that need healthy, local food the most through the lunch line.

¹ Job multiplier data from *The Impact of Seven Cents* report, updated for the 2011-2012 school year; http://www.ecotrust.org/media/7-Cents-Report_FINAL_110630.pdf

That said, it's not enough to just put good food on the lunch trays. Educational activities – such as school gardens, farm field trips, and cooking lessons – are critical². They're the link between exposing kids to healthy local food, and actually getting them to eat the broccoli, carrots, and kohlrabi that they've never seen before.

Beyond increasing knowledge and consumption, school gardens are a beautiful platform for experiential education, from math to writing, art to science. I've personally seen some of the biggest “problem” kids thrive in school gardens. In the garden they focus, engage, and connect to the places, people, and processes that nourish us all. With the support of school gardens through the Farm to School Grant Program, these outdoor classrooms – more than 600 in Oregon! – will continue to grow and thrive.

We should invest in farm to school as a state because it works. The data demonstrates farm to school investments result in healthy kids, vibrant farms, and local jobs. Connecting our kids to Oregon and giving every student opportunities to enjoy and be nourished by its bounty is priceless. I urge you to expand funding and support for the Farm to School Grant Program in 2019-2021, so that we can continue to increase the number of students, farmers, ranchers, fisherman, and communities who benefit from this impactful program.

Thank you for the consideration and for your service.

Sincerely,



Angela Hedstrom
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² National Farm to School Network “Benefits of Farm to School”; <http://www.farmentoschool.org/Resources/BenefitsFactSheet.pdf>

