



Oregon Association of
Conservation Districts

To: Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
senr.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov
From: The Oregon Association of Conservation Districts

Re: Support for HB 2086 Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program
Date: March 6th, 2019

Dear Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Olsen, and members of the committee,

On behalf of the Oregon Association of Conservation Districts, **I am writing to express our support for HB 2086.** OACD serves and represents 45 Soil and Water Conservation Districts across the state that protect and enhance soil quality, water quality and quantity, and habitat by working closely with private landowners, many of whom are farmers, as well as nonprofit and government partners like the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB). OAHP could become a keystone in the future of Oregon's unique collaboration between working lands and conservation of soil, water, and habitat. In the 2015-2017 biennium, Oregon's Soil and Water Conservation Districts approved new conservation plans on over 18,000 acres, demonstrating abundant landowner interest in voluntary conservation and future opportunities for further conservation through programs like OAHP.

The \$38 million-worth of projects proposed in letters of interest further demonstrate that the demand for agricultural conservation goes beyond what can be satisfied with existing programs. Because we have not had a state match for programs like the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, **Oregon leaves millions of dollars of federal dollars on the table each year.** We thank the legislature for establishing OAHP in 2017 to provide the framework for this match, addressing the pressing need to conserve agricultural land through a program that **embodies how conservation and agriculture are not only compatible but also complementary.**

Over the past year, the OAHP Commission, a group of leaders appointed by ODA, OWEB, ODFW, DLCD and OSU Extension, oversaw the program and finalized administrative rules. The 11 Commissioners make up a statewide leadership body that represents Oregon's farming, ranching, conservation and tribal communities. They collectively have volunteered hundreds of hours during the past year to attend monthly meetings and develop OAHP's administrative rules, which are ready to implement as soon as funding is secured. The technical fixes in HB 2086 are the result of an extensive public comment process and discussions between the Commission, OWEB, and key partners like the Oregon Department of Agriculture to **ensure the OAHP will be efficient, effective, and leverage the highly successful partnership approach to agricultural conservation in Oregon.**

As Oregon continues to face pressure on its productive agricultural land from low-density development, fragmentation, population growth, succession challenges and more, there is an urgent need for the voluntary tools that the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program is designed to

provide. **We encourage you to support the technical fixes in HB 2086, and to further support agricultural conservation through funding the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (HB 2729).**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anna Freitas". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Anna" and last name "Freitas" clearly distinguishable.

Anna H. Freitas
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