



March 22, 2023

Co-Chairs McLain and Frederick, and members of the Committee:

As a national leader in innovative Child Nutrition Programs, Portland Public Schools (PPS) strongly supports including the Farm to School program in the Oregon Department of Education's budget at the current level of \$10.2 million to increase purchases of Oregon foods for Oregon students. A state investment in Farm to School and School Garden programs will create lifelong supporters of Oregon agriculture while developing markets for more high quality foods from local farmers, ranchers, fishermen, regional food processors and packers.

1. Portland Public Schools has over 15 years of experience implementing Farm to School. In the 2006-07 school year, Farm to School purchasing was implemented district wide with our Harvest of the Month program and has been a regular feature on PPS menus ever since. Through this successful program, Portland students in all schools have been introduced to new varieties of familiar Oregon foods such as apples, berries, watermelon and pears and new foods that are less commonly served including asparagus, Brussels sprouts, parsnips, kiwi berries, mushrooms, beets and winter squash. Portland's *Local Flavors* promotion features an entrée or meal of local foods including foods such as 100% grass fed beef hamburgers from Carman Ranch, hummus from The Better Bean Company, rockfish from the ocean waters just off Astoria, kimchi by Choi's Kimchi, turkey from Champoeg Farm, and hand-made tamales from Salsa Locas in Portland. Connecting growers and processors has also allowed us to expand partnerships and serve local foods more frequently. An example is Camas Country Mill flour that is used to make yakisoba noodles from Umi Organic. This entrée has gone on to receive the award as one of the best K-12 school lunches in the country ([2019 Food Management Magazine](#)). The District is excited to continue pursuing other new Oregon grown and made foods such as tofu, and expanding purchases of Oregon beef, poultry and cheese to be more regularly served to the students.

2. An investment in Farm to School will directly benefit Oregon farmers and producers and stimulate the economy. Portland's local purchases are currently over 40% of our total purchases. We are prepared to expand Farm to School purchasing if the additional resources are made available. Based on an earlier study in 2009 of the pilot Farm to School program in Portland Public Schools and Gervais School District, every dollar spent through this type of program has a 1.86 economic multiplier. A pilot investment of \$160,000 (\$0.07 per lunch) inspired over \$1.1 million in local spending and economists traced the dollars through 401 of 409 economic sectors in Oregon. Farm to School legislation assist districts like Portland to not only sustain but to expand opportunities with local food growers and makers within Oregon. While the additional funding may not cover all costs, it does assist in making that purchase possible and the rest of the purchase uses federal monies that invest in our local economy. The Portland Public Schools Nutrition Services department has, for almost a decade, been able to invest an estimated \$2.2 million dollars (or more) annually into locally grown and/or made foods to serve to students.



3. School gardens and Farm to School cafeteria programs create food literate, lifelong healthy eaters through hands-on learning experiences. School gardens and Farm to School programs enhance student preferences for fruits and vegetables and help reduce food insecurity by providing nutritious school meals to the most vulnerable Oregon children. Portland students have access to over 70 school and community gardens, supporting both outdoor learning and the District’s sustainability goals.

I ask that you support including this grant program in the Oregon Department of Education’s budget at the current level of \$10.2 million so this program can continue to support healthy kids, schools and communities. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Whitney Ellersick, MS, RDN
Senior Director, Nutrition Services
Portland Public Schools