



Southern Oregon
LAND
CONSERVANCY

PO BOX 954, ASHLAND, OR 97520 / 541 482 3069 / LANDCONSERVE.ORG

February 8, 2024

To: House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
From: Southern Oregon Land Conservancy
Re: Support for H.B. 4060 – Funding the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program

Dear Chair Helm and Committee Members:

We write to you today in strong support of HB 4060, which would provide \$10.8 million in state funding for the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program. OAHP protects farm and ranch land from development through working land easements, keeping acres in production and enhancing natural resource values. Without state funding in 2024, \$7.2 million already allocated to Oregon through the Natural Resources Conservation Service for this work risks being returned to the federal government

Southern Oregon Land Conservancy (SOLC) was founded in 1978 with a mission to protect and enhance precious lands in Southern Oregon for their human and natural communities. More than a fifth of our 73 conservation easements include working lands, either ranchland, forests, farms or all three, comprising almost half the acreage SOLC protects. Productive working agricultural lands are at risk as population and development pressure grows, so financing easements on those lands is an essential means of extending the life of working agricultural lands. SOLC is exploring the potential to conserve agricultural lands with local partners in Jackson and Josephine Counties, some of which would be eligible for federal financing of at least 50% of the easement cost. Without state funding to match, Oregon risks losing the leverage to access federal agricultural easement funds and conserve more of our most productive lands.

Investing in Oregon's Agricultural Heritage Program contributes to other key goals. Easements can support equity by helping entry of next generation and underrepresented Black, Indigenous, Latinx and other groups historically excluded from land ownership opportunities. Conserving agricultural land can also support essential climate resilience, sequestering carbon in forests, grasslands and soil. We urge the legislature to recognize the many values of Oregon's Agricultural Heritage, and to invest in the OAHP's program with renewed funding. With \$10.8 million in state funding for OAHP, Oregon can leverage already awarded federal dollars to secure the long-term viability of our state's vital farm and ranchlands. These investments will protect tens of thousands of agricultural acres across our diverse geography and their essential contributions to Oregon's economy, food and resource sustainability, and culture. Please support passage of HB 4060 in the 2024 legislative session. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Steve Wise, Executive Director

Jim Coonan, C2 Cattle Company, Eagle Point, OR (SOLC Easement holder)



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