

Submitter: Zoe Bradbury DeSurra  
On Behalf Of: Groundswell Farm  
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5006

Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means:

I am writing to express my support of HB 2979, which provides funding for Oregon's Farmer and Rancher Disaster Resilience Grants as well as similar funding for Food Hubs and Farmers Markets.

The Farmer & Rancher Disaster Resilience Grants are supporting Oregon's small and underserved producers to be more resilient to fire and extreme weather events – funding things like shade cloth, trailers for evacuation, and irrigation efficiency. This funding is a great alternative to traditional disaster relief funding, as it has given farmers the resources to maintain their crops and livestock through disasters, rather than being compensated by the State after they lose them. This is a strategic and responsible use of state funding.

Like so many farmers around the state, drought and water scarcity are impacting our family farm and threatening its continued existence in the face of climate change. Since 1998 our farm has been the only year-round, commercial-scale operation in our remote corner of the state, dedicated to providing produce to local and low-income families, foodbanks, grocery stores, and other outlets. In the Summer of 2023 our irrigation right was regulated off by Oregon Water Resources Department – fully and unexpectedly during the peak of our growing season. For a fresh-market vegetable farm like ours, which relies on weekly irrigation to keep crops alive through the peak of summer, it was devastating.

The Department took regulatory action in our watershed due to inadequate instream flows, which they attributed to climate change. This is a scenario that is likely to repeat itself with increasing frequency as climate change intensifies. For our farm it was a frightening turning point which drew into question how we would survive and adapt as climate change worsens.

In 2024 we applied for and received a Farmer and Rancher Disaster Resilience Grant to build a one million gallon storage pond that could be filled during winter months when rainfall is abundant within our coastal watershed, then tapped in the late summer when our existing water right is at risk of being regulated off. Thanks to those funds we completed the project last Fall and now have a full pond for backup irrigation for future growing seasons.

Unfortunately, many farmers were NOT funded by the Disaster Resilience Grant program due to limited funds. This biennium, \$7 million dollars were requested for the Disaster Resilience grants with only \$2.5 million available. Continuity and an increase

of this funding is critical for Oregon farms and ranches.

HB 2979 passed unanimously out of the House Committee on Ag, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water with over 200 submissions of written testimony in support, including a letter signed by 248 farms, food hubs, farmers markets, community organizations and others. I encourage you to support this program fully, and increase funding for it if possible.

Farming has never been easy, but climate change is making it exponentially harder every year. These grant funds offer small, under-resourced farms like ours a critical opportunity to make strategic investments so we can adapt towards greater resiliency. We tip our hats to the Oregon legislature for allocating these urgently needed funds to support local and regional food systems, small family farms, and diversified, climate-forward agriculture in our state and hope you will continue to do so.

Thank you.

Zoe Bradbury DeSurra