

Ecotrust

Education Subcommittee of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means

July 22, 2020

Co-Chairs Frederick and McLain and Members of Committee:

I am writing on behalf of myself and Ecotrust, a non-profit working across Oregon, to ask you to do all that you can to protect funding for Oregon's Farm to School Grant Program. This funding is critical to helping stabilize our state's economy by supporting the livelihood of our farmers and food producers, and responding to challenges faced by schools as they work to nourish our children during these unprecedented times.

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

Oregon's Farm to School Grant Program exemplifies the economic, social, and environmental benefits that can be realized when we prioritize and invest in kids, farmers, local food businesses, and communities. This funding is more important than ever in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and its disproportional impact of the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities in our state. Farm to school resources create direct and ripple-effect benefits for food producers, their distributors, workers across the food chain, educators, school nutrition services, children, and families. The Farm to School Grant funding that is currently unallocated are the components of the program that could have the most significant economic impact, especially during the COVID-19 crisis:

- Competitive Procurement Grants specifically incentivize schools to purchase from Black, Indigineous, and other People of Color--populations that have been disproportionately impacted by the effects of COVID-19.
- Producer Grants provide critical funding for small to mid-sized producers to acquire necessary infrastructure to effectively meet the needs of the school market, especially pre-portioned and packaged grab and go items that are critical for school nutrition service's COVID-19 response.
- Technical Assistance Grants provide the resources necessary for state agencies and nonprofit partners to help schools find Oregon foods and provide effective outdoor education during the pandemic.

The current proposal of \$7.8 million in cuts would be *devastating* for farm to school in Oregon. The Grant Program can sustain \$2.55 million in cuts as long as all of the Farm

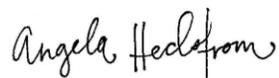
to School Grant Programs included in HB 2579 are maintained at some level. These grants are interdependent so that the program can effectively address economic, social, and environmental well-being together.

Ecotrust's mission is to inspire fresh thinking that creates economic opportunity, social equity, and environmental well-being. Our goal is to foster a natural model of development that creates more resilient communities, economies, and ecosystems. After over a decade of work on farm to school locally and nationally, we know that Oregon's Farm to School Grant Program is critical to the development of a strong regional food system that will increase resilience to climate change and the pandemic we are facing now, while creating economic opportunity, improving land management, promoting equitable outcomes, and building pathways to better community health.

Please do all you can to protect this critical funding for the Farm to School Grant Program.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and for your service to this wonderful place we call home.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Angela Hedstrom".

Angela Hedstrom
Farm to School Coordinator, Ecotrust
Portland, Oregon