



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 07, 2017

CONTACT

Kelley Beamer, Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts: 503-719-4732,
kelley@oregonlandtrusts.org

Dylan Kruse, Sustainable Northwest: 303-328-7524,
dkruse@sustainablenorthwest.org

Mary Anne Nash, Oregon Farm Bureau: 541-740-4062,
maryannenash@oregonfb.org

Oregon's first voluntary farm protection program passes Legislature

Salem, Oregon: Today, the Oregon House and Senate passed a landmark bill launching a new farm and ranch land protection program for the state. HB 3249 will create the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program, Oregon's first voluntary program to help farmers and ranchers protect working lands and the fish and wildlife habitat they support.

The Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program bill (OAHP) was developed during a two-year effort by the following six statewide organizations that represent agriculture and natural resource conservation: Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts, Oregon Association of Conservation Districts, Oregon Cattlemen's Association, Oregon Farm Bureau, Sustainable Northwest, and The Nature Conservancy.

"The diverse groups and bi-partisan support that rallied behind HB 3249 really speaks to the importance of Oregon's agricultural heritage for all Oregonians," said Representative Brad Witt (D-Clatskanie). "We have to decide whether we want to preserve those lands and their ecological benefits, or to allow them to be fragmented and sold off in a way that harms the agricultural and conservation purposes of these lands."

The program addresses key issues farmers and ranchers face in Oregon: the conversion and fragmentation of farmland and the challenge of planning for the next generation of farmers and ranchers.

“The family farms and ranches in Oregon are something we have to preserve,” said Representative Knute Buehler (R-Bend) one of the chief cosponsors of the bill. “And they are under assault by two big factors: first, the ever-growing crush of urbanism, and the second is a lack of succession planning. The Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program helps to address both of these issues by providing voluntary tools for landowners.”

In passing the OAHP, the legislature provided \$190,000 over the next biennium to set up rules for the program and establish the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Commission to administer future program funds. In conjunction with the Commission, the program will be managed by the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board to provide grants to landowners to protect their working lands, enhance natural resource values, and assist with succession planning.

“Oregon’s working lands are not only a critical economic driver for the state, but those who work the land also steward important fish and wildlife habitat,” said Representative Brian Clem (D-Salem), another chief cosponsor of the bill. “I am pleased that the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program recognizes the vital contribution of both to our state.”

#####



The Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program is designed to support farmers and ranchers like Woody Wolfe, a sixth-generation farmer in Wallowa County who is taking steps to conserve his family's ranch (above) at the confluence of the Lostine and Wallowa rivers.
Photo by Rick McEwan