



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## State Board Approves Administrative Rules for Oregon's New Agricultural Heritage Program to protect important farm and ranch lands

**Cannon Beach, Oregon:** Today, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) approved the administrative rules for the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP), finalizing a new working lands protection grant program for the state. These rules were developed over the last year by the 11-member Oregon Agricultural Heritage Commission, a diverse body of leaders from the agriculture and natural resource sectors. The OAHP is Oregon's first voluntary grant program to help farmers and ranchers protect working lands and the fish and wildlife habitat they support.

The legislation authorizing the creation of the OAHP was signed into law by Governor Brown in September of 2017 after receiving strong bipartisan support in both the House and Senate. OAHP is also supported by a broad coalition of agriculture and natural resource conservation groups, including the Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts, Oregon Association of Conservation Districts, Oregon Cattlemen's Association, Oregon Farm Bureau, Sustainable Northwest, The Nature Conservancy, and 1000 Friends of Oregon.

“The diverse groups and bipartisan support for the OAHP really speaks to the importance of Oregon’s agricultural heritage for all Oregonians,” said Representative Brad Witt (D-Clatskanie), chief co-sponsor of a soon-to-be introduced bill that would provide the \$10 million dollars necessary to fund the OAHP. “In this legislative session, we need to either commit to preserving our agricultural heritage and all of its co-benefits or allow Oregon’s working lands to be further fragmented and sold off in a way that may irreparably harm agricultural and conservation purposes.”

The finalized [OAHP rules](#) offer a suite of tools to help farmers and ranchers pass their legacies on to the next generation. These tools include a voluntary grant match for working lands conservation easements and covenants, which help farmers and ranchers preserve working lands for agriculture and the fish and wildlife habitat they support. The OAHP will be managed by the its Commission and OWEB.

If the proposed funding bill passes during this legislative session, farmers and ranchers can apply for grants to protect their working lands, enhance natural resource values, and assist with succession planning. A fully funded OAHP will also make conservation projects much more competitive for a pot of matching federal funds, recently enlarged by the 2018 farm bill.

“Oregon’s working lands are a critical economic driver for the state and it’s important that we preserve our irreplaceable natural resources,” said Senator Bill Hansell (R-Athena), another chief co-sponsor of the OAHP funding bill. “I am pleased that OWEB approved these rules so that we are ready to help farmers and ranchers preserve working landscapes and promote resilient rural communities. This bill is a win-win, bipartisan opportunity to leverage federal funds and protect Oregon’s agricultural heritage. I encourage my colleagues in the legislature to fund the OAHP and make this opportunity a reality.”

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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