Oregon Agriculture Heritage Program (OAHP)
2022 Funding Request - $5 million

Background
In 2017, the legislature created the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP) with significant bipartisan support. OAHP was designed by agricultural and conservation groups to protect farm and ranch land, keep it in production, and enhance its natural resource value. OAHP is administered by OWEB and is ready to implement, but it has yet to be funded.

OAHP includes four grant programs:

1. Working Land Easements: Compensate farmers and ranchers for protecting their land and its natural resource values. Working land easements are voluntary contracts between a landowner and an entity like a land trust or soil and water conservation district that remove development rights that conflict with agriculture and conservation. Landowners are compensated for the monetary value of the development rights and the land remains in production.

2. Conservation Management Plans: Compensate landowners for implementing practices that conserve soil and water and enhance existing habitat.

3. Succession Planning: Helps landowners pass their land onto the next generation.

4. Technical Assistance: Support for non-state organizations to implement the grant programs.

Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP) Benefits
- Could bring federal dollars to Oregon that are currently going to other states. Oregon has received only 0.4% of federal agricultural easement dollars—Rhode Island has received 6x as much funding. States that provide match funding receive on average 3x as much as states without match funding.
- Keeps farm and ranch land in production. Easements and conservation management plans enhance both agricultural and natural resource values and do not remove water rights necessary for agriculture. Succession planning helps with intergenerational transfers.
- Enhances conservation by incentivizing landowners to avoid developing their land and compensating them for practices that conserve soil and water and enhance existing habitat.
- Supports rural businesses by allowing farmers to get cash from their real estate while still keeping it in agriculture. This is a vital tool for creating a financial buffer in tough times and making farmland more affordable to the next generation.

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OAHP Benefits (continued)

- **Reduces carbon emissions**: an acre of farmland produces 58-70 times fewer greenhouse gas emissions than an acre of urban land and provides more opportunities for activities that sequester carbon. Protecting farmland while growing cities in a compact manner reduces 33 tons of GHG emissions **per acre per year** when compared to sprawl development.
- **Benefits rural communities** with dollars that recirculate in rural economies.
- **Benefits the state** by supporting the state’s 2nd largest economic sector (agriculture) and the rural communities, open spaces, and fish and wildlife habitat that depend upon it.

What $5 Million Will Do

In 2022, we are seeking $5 million for landowner grants for conservation management plans and working lands easements/covenants.

- This funding would allow OAHP to leverage a federal match for 50% of the value of a project with a state contribution of just 25% (landowner donations, which are eligible for enhanced tax credits, constitute the remaining 25%). This means that a **$500,000 state contribution** would deliver **$1 million in federal funds and secure a $2 million easement**, permanently protecting that land and its natural resources.
- The current Farm Bill allocates $450 million per year in federal match funding for agricultural easements. We hope this allocation will increase with the 2023 Farm Bill, and the reconciliation package could also include additional funding, but future funding is uncertain. To maximize Oregon's ability to leverage current and future funds, we need to be able to provide a state match.

Funding OAHP Would Deliver Tremendous Return on Investment

- There is significant demand for OAHP’s grant programs. In 2019, the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Commission received **28 letters of interest** from organizations representing landowners interested in conservation and working lands easements, which would have **permanently protected 76,000 acres**.
- **Agricultural easement programs are successful and popular in most other states.** 27 other states have working land easement match programs. In 2021, Washington has provided $9M, California has provided $26.5M, and Colorado has provided $11.6M in state match funding.
- Colorado found that $1 dollar of federal ag easement funding generates $2.19 in local economic activity.
- Texas’s agricultural easement program delivers a 27:1 return on investment and 10:1 leveraging ratio when factoring in the support for rural economies, flood prevention and damage reduction, and water quality and supply benefits that the program delivers.
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