



# Oregon Department of Education

Kate Brown, Governor

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### HB 2721: Oregon Farm to School Grant House Committee on Rural Communities, Land Use and Water March 19, 2015

Chair Clem, members of the Committee, I'm Rick Sherman with the Oregon Department of Education, where my title is Farm to School and School Garden Coordinator. I manage the current version of this Oregon Farm to School grant.

#### Background:

The Oregon Farm to School grant was initially authorized in the 2011 legislature and expanded in 2013. The point is to provide funding to school districts to buy and serve local foods.

#### Issue:

ODE can do a lot of educating and promoting, and connecting people to ideas and to resources, but until the schools have funding to this connection, many of them are not going to actually be successful or even try to attempt a farm to school program. Speaking as a former Oregon Food Service Director for over 20 years, I know that the Directors have a hard enough time breaking even and meeting regulations. So the grant program gives the opportunity by providing funding to school districts to buy local foods, and to do "food, garden, and agriculture-based education."

The reason we include the education is because we know that the education piece is necessary to get kids to eat different foods. Kids are NOT necessarily eating fresh, local food if it is simply placed on the lunch line. However, kids are VERY interested in eating anything that they had a chance to grow or harvest, or tasting new foods that are offered to them in an engaging way or with a story. For an example of this, let me tell you about a time when I used to be a food service director. When there was a little bit of lettuce from the school garden mixed into the salad, everyone wanted some. We even had three TV stations, a newspaper and radio station cover the event: one small pan of lettuce! It works just as well if the kids have gone to visit Farmer Molly's farm, and then we serve lettuce from Farmer Molly's farm. So, we know that these educational efforts make a big difference in what kids will eat in the cafeteria, so they were built into the grant program.

#### Proposed Legislation:

As part of the process of managing this grant, I hosted a meeting/conference call at ODE to all current Farm to School grantees to get their pulse of how it was going with the grant. I already know that they're on track to spend all of the funds, but we wanted to know what did they not

like about this grant, what would they change? We then were able to provide this feedback from the field to the partners who drafted the proposal. Here's what we found out:

The Food Service Directors liked the current model of "Funding for at least 80% school food and at least 10% education;" thereby being able to flex the 10% to suit their situation.

The "15 cents per lunch" was too restrictive to manage. The Food Service Directors wholeheartedly supported a change of utilizing the funds in an uncomplicated method of reimbursing purchases for any Child Nutrition Meal (breakfast, lunch, snack, summer lunch, CACFP Supper). No longer would they have to keep the food separate, even though the programs typically purchase food for all programs at the same time. The logistical process of tracking the food and submitting claims would be simplified as well. Many directors indicated that if the funds were spread out for all in a non-competitive award, yet it remained in the same "lunch-only" format that we have currently, it wouldn't be worth it to them and they would opt out. However with the change described above, they were overwhelmingly positive.

Fiscal:

ODE does not anticipate that HB 2404 will have a discernable negative fiscal impact on ODE. ODE can continue to manage the grant in the current capacity, and we believe it is "scalable" and we would continue to be able to manage the grant with the proposed changes.