



Friends of Family Farmers ♦ 249 Liberty St NE, Ste 212 ♦ Salem, OR 97301

503-581-7124 ♦ www.FriendsofFamilyFarmers.org

February 12, 2019

Testimony on HB 2729 Support Funding for the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program

Chair Clem, Members of the Committee

Friends of Family Farmers represents small and mid-sized family farmers across Oregon. We work to build strong local and regional food systems and to ensure that family-scale agriculture remains viable in our state today and into the future.

We are writing in support of HB 2729 and funding for Oregon's Agricultural Heritage Program. We first began supporting working lands conservation easements as a tool to protect farmland and family farm viability nearly a decade ago. The issue was identified through Farmer and Rancher Listening Sessions we held across the state beginning in 2009, and was among many Priority Action Items highlighted in our 2010 Agricultural Reclamation Act, a roadmap to sound agricultural policies written by Oregon's family farmers and ranchers.

In the face of issues such as growing corporate and out-of-state ownership of Oregon's farms, consolidation in the farming sector, rising land prices, an aging farmer population, and development pressures, farmers identified the need to protect the continuity of viable and existing farmland as well as the need for greater assistance in helping pass land and farm businesses to the next generation as key issues for the state to address. Solutions to these challenges included "practical conservation easements that are designed to protect farmland" and "financial and succession planning ... necessary to transfer agricultural land and businesses" to the next generation of farmers and ranchers.

While we are supportive of HB 2729, we want to urge the Legislature to keep a keen eye on this program and how the funds are spent, being open to making adjustments in the future if necessary to help prioritize limited funds. During the summer of 2018, we commented on the proposed rules for the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program, suggesting a number of ways to prioritize funding to ensure a focus on farmland affordability, access to land for beginning farmers and socially disadvantaged producers, and to limit the ability of out-of-state land owners and real estate investment firms to receive funds from the program. Many of our suggested rule changes were not adopted and we remain concerned that clearer prioritization of program funds may still be needed to achieve these goals.

Sincerely,

Ivan Maluski
Policy Director