



OACD POLICY BRIEF: OREGON AGRICULTURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM

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Anna H. Freitas

freitaan@oregonstate.edu

BACKGROUND

The **Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP)** is currently undergoing rulemaking, and will be requesting funding from the Oregon Legislature during the **2019 Legislative Session**. OAHP “provides voluntary incentives to farmers and ranchers to support practices that maintain or enhance both agriculture and natural resources such as fish and wildlife on agricultural lands.” The program has one staff member, Nellie McAdams (OAHP Coordinator), who facilitates the management of the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Fund by a commission of representatives from agricultural and environmental conservation groups. The program is housed within OWEB, and intends to address two main problems:

1. In the next two decades, two thirds of Oregon’s agricultural lands will be changing hands as owners retire or pass away. 80% of Oregon farmers and ranchers don’t have a succession plan.
2. Agricultural land is threatened by conversion and fragmentation, and is not adequately protected by EFU zoning or by federal agricultural heritage funding.

The main avenues for conservation work funded by OAHP would be conservation covenants and easements on agricultural land, but also conservation plans like the ones many SWCDs currently create or assist in. Funding for such programs is especially salient considering projected cuts to Farm Bill conservation funding over the next decade. The Agricultural Heritage Fund would appropriate money from the Oregon General Fund, but would also be supported by private contributions. The Agricultural Heritage Commission is responsible for rulemaking and funding recommendation, as well as advising on the OAHP grant program for conservation work on agricultural lands and succession planning.¹ Administrative rules may provide more specificity to the criteria or grant application process, but existing criteria include:

- protection of “farming or ranching on working land,”
- protection or enhancement of fish and wildlife habitat and water quality,
- “The capacity of the organization that filed the application to enter into a conservation management plan, accept a working land conservation covenant or working land conservation easement, and the competence of the organization,”² and
- “The extent to which the benefit to the state from the investment may be maximized, based on the ability to leverage grant moneys with other funding sources and on the duration and extent” of the plan, covenant or easement.³

The next steps for OAHP are rulemaking and the budget request. Since OAHP could compete with other sources of funding for SWCDs, OACD may need to weigh and discuss trade-offs with OWEB and other partners when working toward an OAHP that is favorable to SWCDs. Overall, OAHP will likely result in an increase in funding for Districts, or at least an expansion of types of projects eligible for OWEB grants. It may also be a subset of OWEB in which SWCDs face slightly less competition than in other OWEB grant programs because of the agricultural focus.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Allies include: OAHP Coordinator, Nellie McAdams and two commissioners (Ken Bailey, Deschutes/Hood River Basin Representative for OACD, and Doug Kraemer, vice-chair of Marion SWCD Board).
- OAHP is conducting a “mock grant application” process in late Summer to early Fall 2018, in part to collect narratives for use in lobbying for funding in the next Legislative Session.

OPTIONS

Options are listed from most passive to most active.

1. Allow allies in OAHP to work independently and exercise their own discretion, allow Districts to independently submit mock grant proposals.
 - Pros: Conserves OACD's limited resources, and OAHP will likely seek our input anyway.
 - Cons: Risks inconsistent messaging, internal competition, inaccurate representation of OACD/SWCD interests in OAHP. Could lose opportunity to increase resources and role in conservation via succession planning programs.
2. Actively advocate for increasing SWCD/OACD role in conservation grants, easement and covenant management, actively craft mock grant approach, but take a passive approach on succession planning.
 - Pros: More consistent, stronger messaging to OAHP and other decisionmakers, while staying within our area of expertise. Could still have opportunity for input on succession planning via partners.
 - Cons: Could lose opportunity to increase resources and role in conservation via succession planning programs. Limits later authority on succession planning, if that piece of the program is actualized.
3. Actively advocate for increasing SWCD/OACD role in conservation grants, easement and covenant management, AND succession planning. *Sub-option:* advocate for partnership in which OACD is a secondary implementer of succession planning, working closely with OSU Extension, FoFF, Northwest Farm Credit Services, or another organization with succession planning expertise.
 - Pros: More consistent, stronger messaging to OAHP and other decisionmakers. Potential to increase SWCD resources and implementation of conservation across the state through succession planning programs linked with other OAHP-related projects.
 - Cons: Most resource intensive option. Potential that workload will increase without matching increase in resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering OACD's limited resources, I would recommend Option 2 or, if resources allow it, Option 3 with the stipulation that OACD should work with a partner who would take on the bulk of the succession planning work. The projects OAHP would support are very well aligned with SWCDs' work, and OACD could reasonably argue that Districts would be among the most logical and efficient organizations to do the groundwork for reaching OAHP goals. OACD can advocate for continuing OACD/SWCD representation on the OAHP Commission, and involvement in OAHP rulemaking and legislative funding requests could increase funding for Districts. The mock grant process is an excellent opportunity to craft a consistent message to OAHP and the Legislature, which would increase chances for sufficient funding to OAHP and for increased OAHP support to Districts.

Succession planning is not as clearly aligned with our interests, but would likely support conservation across the state and could increase funding to Districts or OAHP. Poor succession planning increases the chance that land will be sold and developed for uses that are less amenable to conservation. Pairing succession planning with conservation planning services could be an efficient way to implement both processes and leverage overlapping policies and resources, including communications with landowners. Taking on succession planning tasks could bolster OACD arguments for increased funding and support to Districts, but there is no guarantee that the support would meet or exceed the increased workload. Existing resources for succession planning should be leveraged.

¹ (HB 3249-A, S 6 and 10)

² (HB 3249 S6(a-d)).

³ (S6(e)).