



Oregon

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September 23, 2026 Oregon Agricultural Heritage Commission Meeting

Staff report – Agenda Item C. Working Land Conservation Easement Grant Time Extension Request

MEMORANDUM

To: Oregon Agricultural Heritage Commission

From: Robin Meacher, Transactions Coordinator

Renee Davis, Acquisitions and Special Programs Coordinator

Introduction

Staff requests the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Commission (OAHC) recommend the OWEB Board extend the closing date for the following Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP) funded Conservation Easement projects: Box T Ranch (225-7106-23849), Country Heritage Farms (225-7105-23848), and Carman Ranch (225-7101-23837). All of these grants were awarded OAHP funding in early 2025.

Background and Requests

Box T Ranch: Blue Mountain Land Trust (BMLT) was awarded funds for Box T Ranch to acquire a working lands conservation easement on approximately 3,697 acres in the John Day Basin to protect the property's significant agricultural and natural resource values. The property hosts healthy rangeland and irrigated pasture, while supporting habitat for several terrestrial and aquatic species, including northwest white-tailed deer, mule deer, elk, bighorn sheep and bald eagles. This property includes approximately one mile of the John Day River, important habitat for anadromous fish, including summer steelhead, mid-Columbia Spring Chinook, and John Day River bull trout, as well as 4 miles of McClellan Creek, a historic salmon-bearing stream. BMLT has worked diligently with the landowners on performing due diligence items, including conservation easement drafting with review and approval from OWEB, surveyor review of the property's legal description to confirm the boundaries for the conservation easement, and completion of an environmental site assessment and mineral evaluation with satisfactory results. At the time of their request for this extension, BMLT had contracted an appraiser and was in the process of finalizing management plan and baseline documentation report details and resolving outstanding title issues in a manner acceptable to OWEB. Upon completion of these items, BMLT will complete final reviews of any remaining required due diligence items from NRCS. This project is matched with NRCS ACEP-ALE funds that expire March 31st, 2028, with the eligibility to request up to two additional 12-month extensions from NRCS. BMLT requests that the OWEB grant deadline be extended to June 1, 2027 to allow for the time it feels necessary to complete the last remaining due diligence items and allow for the 90-day NRCS review requirement.

Country Heritage Farms: Oregon Agricultural Trust (OAT) was awarded funds for Country Heritage Farms to acquire a working lands conservation easement on approximately 304 acres of

significant farmland located immediately adjacent to the city of Dayton in Yamhill County. The property has prime farm soils with demonstrated farm viability and resiliency. The 62-acre riparian area consisting of mixed deciduous riparian forest, mixed conifer forest, and remnant mixed Oregon white oak protects the year-round Palmer Creek. The farm is a recharge area for the Tualatin Basin aquifer, one of the four structural basins of the Willamette Lowlands regional aquifer. The landowner engaged in succession planning with its family after the OAHP award was made, which included negotiation of the easement terms as part of an overall updated succession plan for the Country Heritage Farms property. This internal work with the family delayed progress on the overall project. OAT produced a conservation easement draft for OWEB review in August 2026, along with a copy of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between OAT and the landowners outlining collaboration on completing the project. An appraiser has been engaged and will proceed once a final draft of the easement has been approved by OWEB. The remaining due diligence items, including environmental contamination reviews, final title work, and survey work are still to be completed.

This project is matched with NRCS ACEP-ALE funds that expire March 31st, 2028, with the eligibility to request up to two additional 12-month extensions from NRCS. OAT requested that the OWEB grant be extended into 2028 to mirror the NRCS parcel agreement for matching funding.

Carman Ranch OAHP Conservation Easement: Wallowa Land Trust (WLT) was awarded funds for the Carman Ranch OAHP Conservation Easement project to acquire a working lands easement on approximately 1,946 acres in Wallowa County. The easement will preserve priority rangeland, critical for maintaining the long-term viability of the local livestock industry and the essential habitat provided by the property's grasslands. The property is adjacent to and part of the Zumwalt Prairie grassland system. WLT has worked diligently to complete all required due diligence items (including a finalized appraisal), which have been reviewed and approved by OWEB, and reviewed and approved (in-part) by NRCS. Additional late-breaking adjustments to the conservation easement have been requested by NRCS and WLT is in the process of working with NRCS to incorporate these into the easement deed, which OWEB then will review. Due to uncertainty around NRCS review timelines compounded by the upcoming transition between federal fiscal years, WLT and OWEB staff concurred it was prudent to provide additional time if necessary to accommodate NRCS review timelines. This project is matched with NRCS ACEP-ALE funds that expire March 31, 2027, with the eligibility to request one remaining 12-month extension available from NRCS. WLT requested an extension of the OWEB grant to March 31, 2027 to align with their NRCS deadline.

Recommendation

Box T Ranch: Staff recommend extending the grant deadline for the Box T Ranch (225-7106-23849) project to June 1, 2027 as requested by BMLT. This would result in an additional five months beyond the 24-month grant window anticipated in administrative rule.

Country Heritage Farms: Staff recommend extending the grant deadline for Country Heritage Farms (225-7105-23848) to September 30, 2027. This extension is shorter than the timeframe requested by OAT, but still an additional nine months beyond the 24-month grant window anticipated in administrative rule. The September 30, 2027 deadline would allow for a formal checkpoint on the grant's progress that falls early in the 2027-2029 biennium, when there is better understanding about overall resources and capacity of the OAHP program.

Carman Ranch: Staff recommend extending the grant deadline for the Carman Ranch (225-7101-23837) project to March 31, 2027 as requested by WLT. This extends the grant by two months on top of the 24-month grant window anticipated in administrative rule.