Oregon’s first program to provide instruction on operating a small farm or community food system has opened at Clackamas Community College after the state’s Board of Education approved the Urban Agriculture certificate last month.

The Urban Agriculture program supports a growing demand in the community for fresh, organically grown, locally produced fruits and vegetables. Restaurants, schools, farmers markets and neighborhood cooperatives increasingly offer local produce to customers. At the same time, farmers in Oregon are aging – only 4 percent are younger than 35. Farmers are needed to meet the growing demand, the state found.

The Urban Agriculture certificate at CCC is the only program of its kind in the state of Oregon. The program focuses on an ecological systems approach to sustainable farming principles and practices using organic production methods.

Graduates will be prepared to run small-scale farms, working closely with existing farmers, or manage community gardens, farmers markets or school gardens.

“There’s a generation of people who realize the environmental impacts of growing food – good food – on their own,” said Elizabeth Howley, chair of the CCC Horticulture Department. “People care about eating quality food. There’s a huge difference between a carrot from a chain grocery store and the farmers market.”

Students can complete the certificate in four terms and may start any term except summer. Courses covered include food production, food harvest, farm equipment, organic farming, and fruit and berry growing. Many classes have a lab component where students practice organic systems and production methods for vegetable, grain and fruit crops.

In addition to Urban Agriculture, the CCC offers an associate’s degree in horticulture and landscape, and offers certificates in horticulture, irrigation technician, plant health care and landscape practices.

CCC’s horticulture and landscape programs are the only ones accredited in Oregon by the Professional Landcare Network.

For more information about the Urban Agriculture program at CCC, call Loretta Mills at 503-594-3292, or lorettam@clackamas.edu.