From: Shannon Gray
To: Trant Lindsay
Subject: House Bill 2721
Date: Wednesday, March 18, 2015 10:56:43 PM

Dear Ms. Trant, Committee Assistant of the House Committee on Rural Communities, Land Use and Water,

I'm going to be as honest with you as I can be; I had a template to write about my support of House Bill 2721, but I felt a frank story would better represent my experience and admiration of rural Farm to School. So, why am I sending a letter in support of at 10:30pm the night before the bill's hearing, with cattle mooing in the distance beyond my house? Besides whatever lacking I may have in time management skills, it speaks to the nature of Farm to School in rural areas. The people who coordinate these efforts, such as myself, or who volunteer to support these efforts, like the passionate parents I work with constantly, often scrape to find the time needed to maintain successful Farm to School programming. We do it on our lunch breaks, we write grants after midnight, we juggle three jobs and raising a family, we organize lessons and outreach activities between calving seasons. I know this is true in Farm to School efforts throughout the country, but I hope I can speak specifically to the rural Eastern Oregon iteration of this effort. Despite these obstacles, we remain strong in championing rural Farm to School. We are tenacious and passionate about the importance of these efforts in rural Oregon and the necessity of connecting rural children to Oregon farmers and food.

At North Powder Charter School, where our beloved Vicky Brown spearheaded an ardent Farm to School movement, we have been fortunate to receive Farm to School grants that support our program. These grants have funded not only the purchase of local products for our cafeteria, but have also funded much-needed school garden supplies and educational opportunities for our rural youth. When I first came to North Powder as a FoodCorps service member, I was astonished at the lack of resources available to Farm to School programming – things that are, almost ironically, more present in urban areas. These obstacles – such as rural distribution issues, rural poverty, limited fresh food access – seemed almost insurmountable. It was my experience working with Vicky, and other Farm to School advocates from varying backgrounds, which showed me how much human and social capital is necessary to achieve Farm to School goals in rural areas. As one brief example, Vicky would purchase fruit from a regional orchard two hours away; she would drive her personal vehicle, pick up enough fruit to meet the needs of North Powder and other small rural towns, and deliver the fruit to these rural cafeterias – all of this effort in order to facilitate that connection between children and their food. One of our Cattlewomen's Association members, who provides classroom education during I Heart Beef Month in February, finds the time to do this between ranch chores and raising five children. The best part? Everyone does it with a smile – no matter how hard it gets, no matter how stretched we are. In all honesty, there is no other way to do it.

Some may think that being in a rural area, surrounded by agriculture, that Farm to School is pretty much a day-to-day occurrence. But the reality is, with limited distribution options and limited markets for rural farmers, local food often cannot make it to the tables or lunch trays of rural citizens. Oregon Department of Education's Farm to School program and grant not only help this effort, but make it feasible in an area of limited economic options and limited resources. Without this grant, we would still have the fervor and the willingness to provide the education and opportunities to connect rural children with the people that grow their food, but far less opportunity to provide local food to local schoolchildren. *With* these grants, with the incredible support of people at ODE and legislators like you– with this support we have the ability to *strengthen* our program, to move toward a horizon where rural Farm to School efforts are not only a common occurrence, but a sustainable one.

ODE's Farm to School program is strengthening Oregon's rural economies; the program allows farmers to access new markets and also allows rural children to make deep and lasting connections to the food that grows around them. Parallel to this economic benefit is the strengthening of rural communities – connections are made across generations, farming methods, and food preferences. These connections help create a more resilient and proud rural Oregon, and they help our youth become invested in the places from which they come.

I appreciate your time and I respect that many of you will know what it is to be a rural Oregon resident. My hope is that, in so few words, I've been able to paint a picture on behalf the many youth and adults I work with every day – a picture of the enormous heart of rural Oregon Farm to School.

With many thanks,

Shannon

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"Knowing where your food comes from can change your life." - Alice Waters