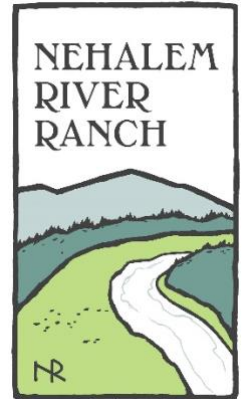


January 31, 2021

RE: Letter of Support for HB 2785, as amended, Meat Processing Infrastructure Grants

Dear Chair Witt and Members of the House Ag and Natural Resources Committee:

Nehalem River Ranch is a family-owned and operated livestock operation that sells locally raised meats to a focused market of regional consumers concerned with ethical eating and who want amazing flavor and quality that our growing region creates. In 2014 we acquired an existing grassfed beef operation with a decade of operating history, then launched a new pastured pork operation on our unique 100-acre property located on the main branch of the Nehalem River.



Over the past seven years we have expanded the farm infrastructure, refined the management systems and cultivated diverse sales channels including direct and retail sales plus wholesale sales to grocers, restaurants, and institutions. Since 2014 we have sold the bulk of our product through online sales platforms and implemented an improved e-commerce system that facilitates inventory management and complex delivery logistics. In 2018 we launched a parallel aggregation side to our business that has allowed us to buy from six smaller livestock producers who cannot justify the logistics to meet the demand from wholesale buyers. This growth has allowed us to pay local producers more than they could get at the auction and has allowed us to hire additional farm help, part-time delivery drivers and marketing support to continue growing.

Our focus moving forward is to grow by supporting our amazing community of smaller livestock producers and to help get their products into the wholesale and direct markets in our region vs selling to the commodities market via auctions. Maximizing economic viability for our regional producers depends on keeping as much of the value-chain as local as possible including adding value through the butchering process to sell meat instead of live animals. It also requires infrastructure for cold storage and distribution. We are proud to be working with a regional collaborative of non-profits, economic development agencies, agritourism groups and a network of chefs, niche grocers, and institutional buyers to keep these food dollars local.

**One of the main bottlenecks to strengthening our North Coast Food System is USDA (or same as) processing, which is required for any of us to sell to restaurants, hospitals, and direct to consumers.** Our success has been through aggregating from multiple producers so that we have the scale necessary to justify the higher costs to transport 7 hours round trip to our USDA butcher and hire shipping of entire pallets of meat back to us. Between our ranch and aggregation companies we are now large enough to be an anchor client of a regional slaughter facility and provide stability of beef and pork numbers to make a new processing enterprise smoother.

Based on our successes thus far and conversations with our fellow food producers who want access to a wider market we are confident we can continue to deliver high quality, locally raised meats to our direct sales customers and restaurant accounts and we will need meat processing infrastructure and the technical assistance to evolve existing businesses and launch new processing ones.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jared Gardner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jared Gardner, Owner/Operator  
Nehalem River Ranch  
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Nehalem, OR 97131  
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