

Submitter: Aaron Nichols

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Early Childhood and Human Services

Measure: HB2728

Chair Reynolds and Members of the Committee,

My name is Aaron Nichols. I co-own and run Stoneboat Farm, a small vegetable farm outside of Hillsboro. We employ about ten people, most of them year round, and provide more than 750 families with vegetables year round through our CSA and Farmers' markets. I am writing to request your support for HB 2728.

As you know from the experts over at the Farmers Market Fund and the Northwest CSA coalition, HB 2728 supports the expansion of Double Up Food Bucks Oregon, a SNAP incentive program with a proven record of success. For every dollar spent on SNAP-eligible foods at participating farmers markets, farm share programs, and grocery stores across the state, shoppers will receive a dollar to spend on Oregon-grown fruits and vegetables.

HB 2728 will be good for farmers. Interest in our CSA and at our markets boomed during the pandemic and has only increased since 2020 and Double Up Food Bucks (DUBF) played an important role in getting us CSA sign ups and dollars at the market. We frequently bring in 400 dollars in Double Up Food Bucks cards per week from our markets - some weeks we see nearly \$500 in market sales to SNAP customers. Our CSA saw \$5,000 in revenue from SNAP and DUBF. But that is not all that DUBF brought in - all of those funds are match funds so we also received an equal amount or more in SNAP funds from the folks buying from us. Right now we see about 5% of our revenue coming from these programs and I am sure many farms are in a similar position. This consistent income helps us pay folks more in times of inflation and hire on extra staff in the summer when things are very busy and hard on our crew.

HB 2728 will be good for families. Last year's DUBF program really helped us financially but that isn't the reason we are happy to take SNAP and DUBF benefits. We are thrilled that these programs open up our CSA to many more folks than we would be able to feed otherwise. Besides the more than two dozen or so families that got CSA shares from us in the summer or winter with their benefits, we have many shoppers at the markets using food assistance - far more than ever before. I have seen more new and more diverse faces than I have ever seen in years of doing farmers' markets. It has been the mission of our farm to feed everyone we can while still paying a fair wage to our employees and DUBF is a central piece to that. Moreover, I can assure you that many, many folks support the basic idea behind this program. Many CSA members donate to support our internal scholarship funds but

DUBF helps this private charity go a lot farther.

HB 2728 will be good for local economies and local communities. If there is anything that I have learned from running a farm business during a pandemic it is that our local communities and local economies are what are going to get us through this crisis and the next crisis (well I've learned that and also "don't have a baby right before a pandemic"). I see my CSA members every week and I had a pretty good chance to see into many of their lives. People were worried, overworked, and a bit scared but they were also doubling down on any community they could be a part of. Our farm was sustained financially and emotionally through this crisis by this upwelling of care and generosity. By passing and funding HB 2728 we will keep money circulating in the economy - I know that folks use all of their benefits and a huge portion of that stays right here to help build up Oregon. But more than the millions of dollars circulating in our community, it is the generosity and care that circulate and build us up. When I was a farm intern years ago and far from my family a mentor of mine told me that, though he was sure the world as we knew it was ending, he was also sure that what we could take with us were the communities we built now. He was certainly right on one account.

Thank you for the consideration and for your service.

'Aaron Nichols