



April 3, 2023

Re: Oregon Farmers Markets Association (OFMA) support for HB 3124

Dear Chair Helm, Vice-Chairs Hartman and Owens, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Ashley Hess. I am the Executive Director of Oregon Farmers Markets Association (OFMA), a small, statewide non-profit organization that offers support and free resources to more than 135 farmers markets throughout Oregon. I am also a 3rd generation farmer and a Board Member for Farmers Market Fund.

I thank you for the opportunity to offer support of HB 3124 with particular focus on the significance of components 4-7 and 4-8 that provide support to small farmers and the community food system in the face of the ongoing impacts from drought and related natural disasters. It is so important that the state prioritizes these community assets when thinking about drought resilience and planning for Oregon's changing water reality.

Component 4-7 creates a separate fund for small farmers to gain drought resilience through the Oregon Community Food Systems Network. The OCFSN has proven its ability to run this kind of program and its members are trusted resources for new, small, and diverse farmers that do not traditionally take advantage of ODA programs. This is distinct from the ODA drought relief and resilience fund because:

- The OCFSN fund prioritized BIPOC farmers and was only open to small farms with under \$300,000 of revenue.
- The OCFSN funds are grants, which are more accessible to small farms than the forgivable loans in the ODAP program.
- OCFSN is using a network of trusted organizations to reach farmers who do not see themselves in or have good relationships with ODA programs.

Component 4-8 creates resilience for Oregon's food system by supporting farmers markets which will allow them to remain resilient in order to keep benefiting farmers and feeding communities even in the face of drought related disasters. Oregon's farmers markets are working toward building more inclusive and healthy food networks. Stable and improved food access to communities across the state is extremely important to advancing equity for Oregon citizens. We need to prioritize these community food systems because:

- Farmers markets provide Oregonians with easy access to fresh and locally grown food for community members of all income levels. In 2021, more than \$1.5 million in SNAP benefits was spent at farmers markets across the state.
- Farmers markets are essential businesses and in times of crisis (like the pandemic, unprecedented weather emergencies, and wildfires) when the centralized food system fails, they provide safe, reliable access to crucial, nutritionally dense food for our communities.
- Data from OFMA's annual census shows that farmers markets have millions of visits each year and generate an estimated \$60M of sales each year.

- Farmers Markets serve as highly efficient and low barrier business incubators for small and new farms to help them reach new customers, establish their brand, and grow into reliable sources of local food for their communities.
- Local and community food systems are good for rural economies. Encouraging this type of farming and these outlets supports the farms that, according to a study from OSU, create more jobs per \$1M in sales, put more money directly into the local economy, and generate more economic activity for other local businesses than commodity farms.

This is personally meaningful to me because:

- My family's farms in the Willamette Valley and Eastern Oregon have both been impacted by drought and climate change.
- OFMA offers direct support to farmers markets as they complete the complicated process of gaining the ability to process SNAP benefits at their markets. Currently more than 90 markets in Oregon welcome SNAP shoppers, additional resources to support markets in this work are needed.
- As a farmers market shopper, I see what an important role farmers markets play in my community and those throughout Oregon and I am eager to support them in meaningful ways.
- As a longtime advocate for equitable food access, I know that working families who shop with SNAP and other food assistance programs at farmers markets would benefit from the investments referenced above.

It is a sound investment to prioritize community food systems that make Oregon more resilient. I urge you to offer strong support of HB 3124 with prioritization of components 4-7 and 4-8.

Sincerely,



Ashley Hess  
Executive Director