

Submitter: Valerie Nguyen
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure: SB5506

Co-Chair Steiner, Co-Chair Sanchez, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Valerie Nguyen. I am a farmers market coordinator of the Oakridge Community Farmers Market and co-director of the Westfir Oakridge Local Food Hub. We serve the vastly low income sister communities of Westfir-Oakridge (pop. ~4k), with our school district experiencing some of the highest childhood poverty rates in the nation. I am writing to request your support for HB 2728.

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.

Before starting the market in 2021, Oakridge/Westfir has been a food desert with only one grocery store and limited access to fresh produce options. Unlike many places in rural Oregon, the area does not have a Grange hall that serves its population as an agrarian meetingplace. The majority of families are low-income, with 37% of residents under the poverty line (more than double the rate in Oregon) and the childhood poverty rate at a severe 66%. By providing access to the SNAP and DUFB program, the Farmers Market helps bridge the access gap to fresh locally-produced food.

The 2021 state funding allowed our market to offer DUFB for the first time this year and I am writing to testify that the impact has been extremely positive. Considering COVID-19 food cost inflation, I would go so far as to say that DUFB is a vital component for our nonprofit farmer's market to open up food access for our low-income rural community.

The DUFB produce match is a powerful tool for local food access and an effective incentive to encourage SNAP program users to come to the market. Our market, and the opportunities it creates for small local farmers to make nutritious fruits and veggies available to our area, would not exist without a low-income program (SNAP). With its focus on local growers and artisan food crafters, the Farmers Market improves our area's overall food resilience, countering the challenges of our area's rural post-timber economy by providing opportunities for budding agricultural and culinary microbusinesses. The Farmers Market also provides a much-needed positive community-building common ground for all people to gather and connect on

bioregional-attuned land use practices and the spontaneous exchange of skills and knowledge.

I ask you to support HB 2728, and to fully fund the bill before the Oregon Legislature adjourns. Thank you for the consideration and for your service.

Valerie Nguyen
Westfir and Oakridge, Oregon